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VEDĀNTA PHILOSOPHY



# Nine Lectures

by

## Swami Abhedananda

PART I



PUBLISHED BY  
**VEDĀNTA ASHRAMA**  
San Francisco, Calif.

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# VEDÂNTA PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE BY

SWÂMI ABHEDÂNANDA

ON

## THE WAY TO THE BLESSED LIFE

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FIFTH EDITION

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SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.



"They attain to the Blessed Life who have ceased to be wicked, whose doubts are cut asunder, senses are subdued, and hearts are undisturbed by desire and passion; who love to do good to all creatures, who have realized the Truth, and whose inner self is molten into the essence of Divine Self."—*Bhagavad Gita*, V, 25, 26.

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## THE WAY TO THE BLESSED LIFE.

In the whole animal kingdom man alone is capable of solving the problem of life. Other animals live, but they cannot ask what life is, nor can they understand its purpose or the source from which it proceeds. Human beings alone are endowed with intelligence enough to ask such questions; they alone can understand the purpose and aim of life, can trace its source and know the various aspects through which the life principle manifests itself in this world of phenomena. From time immemorial this problem of life has been discussed over and over again, and various conclusions have been arrived at, by different philosophers and thinkers of all ages and all climes. Some say that life is a great blessing, that it is the source of unbounded joy and happiness, that it is blessedness itself; while others hold that life is not worth living because it is full of misery, sorrow and suffering, disease and pain, and its end is death. It is true that our earthly life is beset with misfortune, distress, pain, anxiety, and disease, as well as various other sufferings which arise



from the constant struggle for existence; yet none but superficial thinkers will maintain that life is not worth living, or that death is its goal.

When we understand the true meaning of life we know that life is opposed to death, as light is opposed to darkness. Life, in its most abstract sense, means being; it is the same as being, or existence, and death means non-being, or non-existence. Where life is, death cannot exist. If life be a reality, then what we call death must be unreal. That which lives or exists can never die or become non-existent. And that which does not live in any form whatever, can never become existent. Existence can never become non-existence, and non-existence can never become existence. This is the law of nature. Whatever exists will continue to exist; such being the law, whether we consider our earthly life is worth living or not, we cannot say that death is the goal of life. As life or being is deathless and indestructible, so it is birthless and beginningless. That which is subject to death is a compound thing and has a beginning, but that which does not die is simple and therefore has no birth and no destruction. If we look around in this world of phenomena we shall see that that which is birthless, is deathless also, and as life is opposed to death and has no beginning, life is beyond death and birth. Again, that which is birthless and deathless does not change, but that which changes is within the realm of birth and death. As life or being in its true sense is beyond that realm, it cannot change its nature, or decay. There is no sorrow, suffering, misery, decay, death, or change of any

kind in true life, therefore it is blessed. It is blessedness itself.

True life is that eternal, self-existent power which animates all things and is the source of all activity and of all living forms. That power manifests in the animal and vegetable kingdoms as well as in man. From the minutest protoplasm up to the highest man, wherever there is any sign of life, there is the expression of this all-pervading eternal power, which is unchangeable and one in its essence. Electricity is one universal, inscrutable force, but on account of the various ways in which it is made manifest through different electric machines, it appears in many forms,—as heat, as light, or as motion. We see this every day in the electric cars; the one current gives motion, light, and heat. So is it with the universal, mysterious life force; it is one, although appearing many when manifesting through the numberless forms of existence. We may therefore say that true life is one in essence, but its apparent expressions are numberless. Our earthly lives are so many expressions of the true or Real Life which is Blessedness, which is one and eternal. Life being real, its apparent expressions must be the expressions of Reality too. These expressions are what we call apparent life. They are like so many reflections of the True Being of the universe. These expressions or manifestations of that universal Life vary in different individuals because of the variety of conditions upon which those reflections depend; again the conditions being subject to change, the reflections or expressions

of True Life appear as changeable. The apparent life can shape itself in manifold ways according to the conditions of its environments, and evolves from the lower to the higher, and from the limited towards the unlimited. Our apparent or earthly life is nothing but a symbol of the eternal Life Principle, conditioned by time and space. True Life or Being, or Blessedness, is beyond time and space, and is not bound by conditions of any kind. It is not subject to the laws of phenomena. It is independent and perfect; while the apparent life is dependent upon the laws which govern the world of phenomena, and is conditioned by time and space. True Life or Real Being does not need any help from outside. It does not require anything from beyond itself. It is self-reliant, self-complete, self-sufficient and self-loving; while the apparent life, being an imperfect reflection of the True Life, depends upon the conditions of the environments, and represents imperfectly those higher qualities of self-reliance, self-completeness, self-sufficiency, self-love and independence which make True Life a blessed and a perfect whole. When the apparent life separates itself from the True Being and isolates itself from the Life of the universe, the partial reflections of these higher qualities in the apparent life are then known as "selfishness."

If we examine the relation of this apparent life to the Real Life we understand that it is nothing but a part of that universal life. As a part is related to the whole, and cannot live independently of the whole; as a ray of light or a reflection is related to the sun and

cannot exist independently of the sun, so the apparent life is related to that True Being which is called Blessedness, and cannot exist independently. Like True Life, this apparent life possesses self-love, but, unlike the self-love which is in the True Life, is a love of the particular and not of the whole. True Life or Being loves itself or the whole, and as that whole is God, its love is divine. It lives in God and loves God. The self-love in the apparent life is love of a part alone, as separated from other parts, as isolated from the whole or God; therefore it is selfishness. The apparent self-love is nothing but an attachment to the transitory conditions through which the Life Eternal expresses itself on the physical plane. True Life loves nothing but one unchangeable Reality, while the apparent life loves the changeable personality which is identified with the non-eternal form. On account of this attachment to constantly changing conditions, this apparent life or the individual ego, is subject to the changes of birth and death, is a slave to its conditions, and is sorrowful, miserable, restless, unhappy, and consequently unblessed. The apparent life or the ego appears as unblessed, because the conditions through which the True Universal Life manifests, are limited and imperfect.

Unblessedness consists in the idea of the separateness of the part from the whole, and in the bondages of other imperfections arising from this mistaken notion of individual isolation. To be united to the whole, to be free from the bondages of these imperfections, and to be perfect,—is Blessedness. Each individual

germ of life, which we have already called the apparent life, possesses an innate tendency towards the attainment of this Blessedness, and to freedom from the conditions of unblestness. Our earthly life consists in a continuous fight with the environments which have kept us away from the central Truth, or the Blessed life. We are constantly struggling to expand the sphere of self-love, by breaking down the walls of limitations which constrain the apparent life to a narrow selfishness, and thus to be united with the True Life of perfection. The evolutionists do not know the cause of variation or natural selection. They cannot say what determines life and makes it manifest differently at every step of evolution. But Vedanta philosophy says that the cause of this variation is that innate tendency in a germ of life to be united to the whole and to reach perfection. The aim of each apparent life, or ego, is to reach that state of Blessedness which is the goal of evolution. As we approach nearer and nearer perfection by passing through the various stages of physical, mental and intellectual evolution, the ways of our living become better, and by experience we learn that the best way of true living is not by obeying the dictates of the apparent life or lower self, but by following the blessed will of the universal Being or True Life. We start at first with a little, weak, and dim ray of *will* which gradually becomes wider and stronger and brighter as we ascend through the different grades of evolution. Experience teaches us the relation which exists between the individual will and the Will that governs the universe. When we

realize the true relation of the individual will to the Universal Will, then we find that the life or will which we have so long called ours is not ours, but is simply a part and parcel of that one Life, or one Will, which moves the universe. Our bodies are like so many little instruments through which the Universal Life Principle is expressing itself on the plane of phenomena. The mind, will and life of one individual are not entirely separate from those of another, but they are connected with all mind, all will, and all life by an invisible current of Reality which is one and indivisible. As long as we do not realize this, but, on the contrary, think of ourselves as separate from one another, and as not related to the universe, so long shall we follow the dictates of our limited and imperfect will and think that by so doing we shall gain the highest benefit. The result is that we make mistakes at every step, and these mistakes cause us to feel dissatisfied, unhappy and sorrowful. We do not gain what we wanted, nor do we reach the goal for which we started.

This idea of separateness, this mistaken notion makes the apparent life, or ego, think that it is free and independent while in fact it is bound hand and foot like a slave. The moment we realize our relation to the whole we are no longer bound by any conditions of selfishness, but we are free. At present we are living as slaves without being conscious of our slavery. By mistake we are imagining that we are free, but if we examine our life most minutely, we shall find that we are not free. If we look around us it would be almost impossible to find a man or a woman whom

we could call truly free. We ought to be ashamed of this state of things, but we are not, because we do not know that we are in bondage. Very few, indeed, realize that this life is a life of slavery and drudgery, and that the ego is enchained by the conditions of the phenomenal world. Amongst those who realize this, a few struggle for emancipation and a very few of these become really free. But the majority delude themselves by thinking that they are free, love the present conditions of their unblessed life, and do not seek a better state. There have been cases where a man, born and brought up as a slave and living in the society of slaves, has preferred to remain a slave rather than become a free citizen. Think of some of the negroes of South Carolina, who actually prefer slavery to freedom. If any one gets some idea of freedom and tries to get out of slavery, his fellow slaves will think that he is going the wrong way and will try to force him to continue the old life, and strive by all means to hinder his becoming a free citizen. But a courageous man who loves freedom, and struggles day and night for emancipation, will not be dominated by the influence of others. He will seek the company of those who are also striving to be free, and of those who have wiped off the mark of slavery from their foreheads, to learn from them the means of attaining freedom.

The community in which we are now living is exactly like that of slaves. Being deluded by our vanity and self-conceit we do not realize our present condition, and never struggle for freedom. On the con-

trary, we find fault with those who do, we criticise them, call them crazy or foolish, and essay to put them behind the doors of the lunatic asylums,—such is our mental condition. Are we not slaves to our desires, our passions, our senses, to the body and all the changes that are constantly going on in the machinery of human organism? Are we not slaves of anger, hatred, jealousy, fear and sense enjoyments? Are we not slaves of greed, of wealth and possessions? Are we not slaves to ordinary desires for political power, for name and fame? Are we not constantly obeying the commands of these masters who are ruling within us? Where is our freedom? We are slaves of desires, passions, comfort, luxury, ambition, pride, beauty, anger, hatred and sense pleasures, but we do not feel in bondage, we are not conscious of the fetters. How elated and flattered we feel when any person utters sweet and kind words; how insulted, wounded, and hurt when we hear harsh and unkind words; and how we long for revenge when we are injured. Can there be any condition worse than this? Are we born to follow this course and obey these pitiless masters all our lives? We rarely ask such questions. On the other hand, we say this life is full of happiness and pleasure. While we have a longing for pleasure, we suffer and are unhappy. We are sleeping the sleep of ignorance after drinking, as it were, the cup of the fearfully intoxicating liquor of self-delusion. All humanity is madly pursuing the phantoms of hope which change their colors as one approaches them, or suddenly vanish to reappear at



a distance with fresh brightness, like will-o'-the-wisps, forcing the pursuer to chase them again. The vain pursuit of these phantoms of hope leads humanity into unbearable suffering, misery, and disappointment. We have made ourselves slaves of these deluding phantoms; and this is the way in which we are living. Each individual loves something, strives after something, but knows not what it is, or how to get it. Do you know what we are striving after? We are striving after happiness, but we do not know the conditions through which that happiness comes. It will never come under the conditions in which we are now living. Happiness does not come to a slave. He may delude himself for the time being and may think that he is happy, but when he comes to his senses and asks, am I happy now?—he finds that after all it is not happiness, it is delusion. Happiness does not exist in slavery, but in freedom. He who is free is alone truly happy. That happiness which comes through perfect freedom is eternal. If we want that unbounded and eternal happiness we shall have to become free by breaking down the chain of slavery. We should remember that if we were really free we would have been happy, and we should not need to seek happiness, because freedom is the condition of happiness. Again, before seeking freedom, we must realize the unblessed state of our earthly life, we must become conscious of the fact that the apparent life is a slave life.

The moment we come to know that we are living like slaves, that very moment we begin to feel the effects of slavery in our life and we seek the com-

pany of those that are free and blessed. We then struggle for emancipation. Whatever we want sufficiently we shall surely obtain. Who is responsible for our present slavery? We are slaves because we have bound ourselves hand and foot by our own desires; if we want to conquer them we can do so. We must not blame another person, or God, or Satan, for our slavery. We should blame only ourselves. If we seek freedom and happiness, let us struggle hard enough for them and we shall surely attain to them. This freedom is the highest ideal of all philosophy and religion. What did Jesus say? He said—"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." What is that truth, and what kind of freedom did He mean? We read the Bible, but we do not understand the true meaning of these words. Our eyes are covered with ignorance, therefore we do not see things as they are. Mere reading will not bring knowledge of truth and freedom. That knowledge will come when we really desire it and strive after it.

In the Vedanta philosophy this freedom is called *Mukti*, or *Moksha*. It means emancipation from the bondage of selfishness and all other imperfections. The Vedanta philosophy does not speculate, nor theorize, nor give any artificial scheme of salvation. It describes the conditions of our present life and shows the way to freedom. It does not ask any one to accept anything because it is written in this or that book, but it tells him to find the cause of his slavery and remove it. When the cause is removed, the effect is also gone. Proper diagnosis is absolutely neces-

sary for the successful cure of a disease. Slavery is the result of a diseased mind and the cause of that disease is ignorance, or the non-realization of our true life, in which there can be no suffering and no misery. In that true life eternal happiness reigns supreme. Where shall we find that True Life? Shall we have to go into a cave, or a forest, or a desert to find it? No. It is dwelling within the cave of each individual heart and we must search within. Our Real Life is the background of our apparent ego. It is called by many names. Some call it God, the Father in Heaven, the Blessed Life; while others call it the Soul of our souls, the Atman. The difference is only in name. The dualists call that Truth God, because they look at it from without; but those who look at that Truth from within, call it the Atman, or the Self, the true Spirit, or the divine nature of man. According to Vedanta, this true Life is one, although its expressions are many. When it is looked at through the conditions of time, space, and causation, it appears as the sun, moon, and stars, and all phenomenal forms. They are nothing but so many expressions, or appearances of that one Being or True Life. They exist as such in relation to our mind, and the True Life is behind mind. True Life is unchangeable, but mind is subject to change. Some mistakenly think that mind is all in all, but there is something within us much more subtle, much more important than what we call mind. This something is expressing itself through the changeable medium of mind, the functions of which, as every one knows, are constantly changing. Our intellect

grows, our understanding, too, is subject to growth; but does life grow? No. Life is always life, there is no growth in it, from less life it cannot grow into life; but the conditions through which the life force manifests, change and grow. We generally mistake the growth of the body for the growth of life. The body grows because it is subject to growth, but Life itself is unchanging, free, and divine. It may be asked, if our true Life or divine nature is ever within us, is it not self-contradictory to say that we are living as slaves? If it be true that we are living as slaves, must we not admit that our true Life or divine nature is a slave too? This question was asked by the seekers after truth in ancient times. The sages of India knew that the true nature of man is free, divine, and perfect, and they answered this question by saying: "It is the mind which is the cause of the slavery and bondage, and of the freedom of the apparent man, or ego." Mind alone makes one act as a slave, and it is also mind which leads one to perfect freedom. When the mind is imperfect and attached to the conditions of phenomenal existence, it keeps the soul in bondage; but when that same mind has been purified, when it has been freed from all delusions, it learns to go below the surface of things and begins to discriminate the eternal from the non-eternal, the real from the unreal, True Life from death, Blessedness from unblestness, and thus becomes the means of attaining freedom. It makes us realize what is behind mind, and brings the ego back to the centre of Truth from which it proceeded.

As long as our mind is imperfect we are far away from the central truth of Blessedness. The tendency, however, in each ego is to go back to the centre. Most of the modern thinkers say that life is a struggle with environment. But they do not tell us the object of this struggle. Is it without purpose? No. We are struggling constantly with environment to get back to the centre from which we started, and to break down the walls of selfishness. This struggle will end when the mind is purified. After passing through the various stages of evolution, each ego is bound to attain to freedom. We may not struggle for it now, but sooner or later, according to the experience which we have gathered, the struggle for freedom and perfection must begin for us. We have come into this world to gain experience. By experience is meant the manifestation of latent powers, and the knowledge of the results which proceed from it. A child is born with an undeveloped mind, its wisdom is also undeveloped; but do you think that as it grows older it gathers experience and knowledge entirely from without? No. The germ of all knowledge is already within. If the germ contained no intelligence, it would be impossible for a child to learn anything. We cannot learn if we do not have a tendency to learn. We know that knowledge is nothing but the real property of our own souls. External objects only give the suggestions which bring out that which is hidden within each soul. In trying to manifest the latent powers each soul passes through the various stages of evolution, and after gathering experience in all, reaches perfection.

Those who understand the process of evolution know how painful and tiresome it is to go through many incarnations. Of course, those who think this life is the first and last chance for reaching perfection, have some kind of consolation in the hope of going to heaven, but if they happen to fail in this, their condition is miserable for all eternity. Are not such ideas childish and unscientific? Those who have gone a little deeper, find that these are mistaken notions. The soul existed before the birth of the body and will continue to exist after the death of the body. What we are to-day is but the result of our past, and our future will be the resultant of what we are now. Each apparent life is one of the links in the chain of the evolution of each individual soul. We may remain as visible or invisible, we may go to a higher or to a lower plane, according to the results of our desires; but each of these states is temporary and comparatively brief.

This process of evolution will continue without cessation until it brings us to that state where we become free from imperfections, sorrows, miseries, etc. This is a long, slow process, therefore Vedanta asks, if perfection be the goal of life, why should we wait so long? It says, let us attain more speedily to that goal, let us live the life of blessedness, and be happy from this day; from this moment let us live as masters and not as slaves. Many people think that blessedness, the life of perfection, will come after death, in the grave; but they are mistaken, because after death the life of blessedness or perfection comes only to those who have attained it in this life. Those who have not attained it

here on earth, will not attain it in the grave. We cannot win this state by good works, nor by a belief in a creed or dogma. Virtuous deeds do not produce it as their result. The state of blessedness unfolds itself in our souls when we cease to be wretched, and do not mistake the unreal for the real. Virtue and ethical deeds help the soul by purifying the mind from all selfishness and other imperfections, and by removing the obstacles that obstruct the manifestations of the divine powers. Thus, by doing good works, we prepare the mental field and bring about those favorable conditions under which alone the seed of the divine nature within, can attain to full and perfect expression. When the mind becomes pure it begins to discriminate the real from the unreal, the eternal from the non-eternal, the true Life from the apparent; then it begins to feel the necessity for freedom, and enters consciously upon the struggle to attain it.

Two things are requisite for the attainment of the Blessed Life. First, we should understand the nature of the True Life and realize the difference between the true and the apparent life, and their mutual relation. Secondly, we should struggle for freedom by withdrawing our minds from transitory things and fixing them on that which is eternal; or in other words, we should be unattached to the non-eternal, and love that which is eternal, thus causing our wretchedness to cease. Through love, and love alone, can the apparent life be united with the True Life. Our life is determined by the things we love. If you tell me the thing you love, if you show me the thing you

love, you show me your life; because we live in what we love. If we love the highest, we live on the highest plane; if we love the mere physical form, we are on the material plane. Try to find out which thing you love most, and then you will see where you are living. Let us try to love the highest. If we love the highest we have come nearer and closer to that eternal Truth which is the centre of the universe. The Blessed Life will be ours through love. We cannot attain to that state of blessedness until we realize the unity of life, because blessedness consists not in separateness, but in oneness. The Reality of the universe is One. Truth is always One. It cannot be many, although its expression may be multiform. If we understand the unity of existence, then we have attained the state of divine Life.

Again, love means the expression of oneness. We are one with whatever we really love. Therefore, through love we will reach that unity, or Blessedness. Before we can love the highest, we must know it. Love of a thing is impossible without the knowledge of the nature of the thing. Therefore, knowledge of True Life is the first thing necessary for the attainment of Blessedness. When the apparent life, or ego, knows its real nature, it begins to love that which is unchangeable and one. What then becomes of the lower selfish life? It disappears when True Life dawns, and that moment we become free from death, disease, sorrow, suffering and pain, and reach Blessedness. Then we are far beyond the reach of trouble and misery, just as the sun is always beyond the clouds.



The clouds may hide the sun but can never touch it. The soul of that man who has realized Blessedness cannot be touched by the imperfections which proceed from selfishness. Self-love then changes into divine love, and he becomes conscious of the greatness and majesty of his true nature. Then he knows that all the powers of the universe have proceeded from the infinite source of powers which lies within each individual soul.

The soul of the apparent man then rests in unwavering repose in that One Eternal Being, or the state of Blessedness, and his body and mind work incessantly for work's sake, for helping others. When he turns his love from the many to the eternal One, he reaches the Blessed Life. The life of such a man may be called a personification of all the blessed qualities that exist on that highest plane. When the fountain of blessedness is once opened, all the blessed qualities flow through him eternally. Such a soul, such a pure spirit, is the embodiment of all the best teachings which the Scriptures of the world contain. He is the personification of the Sermon on the Mount. That blessed state was described by Jesus the Christ. He understood it and expressed it at every moment of His earthly life. He loved God; He lived in God, and through God. He manifested divinity. Each individual soul must eventually do the same. Jesus the Christ was not an exception, as is popularly understood. There cannot be any exception to the laws which govern the universe. Every so-called exception is a law. If Jesus attained to blessedness, we also can

attain; each individual soul will attain to that state of blessedness. If we cannot, then Jesus did not attain it. Such being the law, let us realize it in this life. Then all the actions of our life will be blessed, like those of Christ.

This blessed life is described in the Upanishads: "The realization of the Atman, or the eternal Truth, produces a revolution within us. At that time all the knots of desires for transitory things are torn asunder, all doubts cease forever, all questions are solved; and the soul becomes free, emancipated and perfect." The way to such a blessed life is also described: "That realization will come through constant hearing, constant thinking, and proper meditation." First of all, hear constantly and repeatedly that your true life is divine, immortal and perfect. Constant hearing will bring before your mental eye this ideal, and then you will begin to feel it. Secondly, think of your present conditions and compare them with your divine nature. See where you are, how far you are below those highest ideals. Let each of your nerves and brain cells pulsate with the idea that your true nature is divine and free. Then you will get the result of thinking. Thirdly, concentrate your mind on that Divine Being, on your True Nature, on the True Life, whose reflection the apparent life is; meditate on the central truth of oneness and unite the apparent ego with that perfect Life, perfect nature from which proceed all blessedness, holiness, happiness and peace. Through this concentration and meditation the Blessed Life is attained.

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS AFTER THE LECTURE.**

How do you define happiness ?

Happiness is the reflection of our Blissful or Divine Nature on the mind undisturbed by desires, passions, or anxieties. Happiness comes in freedom, never in slavery.

What do you mean by freedom ?

True freedom means the emancipation of the soul from the bondages of ignorance, delusion, selfishness, and other imperfections.

Did you say that the child's mind is like a blank sheet of paper ?

No. It is an exploded theory started by Locke, that the mind of a new-born child is essentially a *tabula rasa*. Vedanta philosophy says that each child is born with certain tendencies and capacities which are the results of the child's experience during its past incarnation.

Did the soul of the child exist before its birth ?

Yes.

When was the soul created then ?

The soul was never created by anybody. It has no beginning. It exists from eternity to eternity.

Do you think each one will attain to blessedness ?

Yes. Each individual is bound to reach the Blessed life sooner or later.

Does not Vedanta teach the doctrine of eternal punishment ?

No. Vedanta teaches that God never punishes the wicked nor rewards the virtuous. Punishment and reward are but temporary reactions of our own actions.

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# VEDÂNTA PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE BY

SWÂMI ABHEDÂNANDA

ON

## WHO IS THE SAVIOUR OF SOULS?

DELIVERED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE VEDÂNTA SOCIETY,  
AT CARNEGIE LYCEUM, NEW YORK, SUNDAY,  
DECEMBER 23rd, 1900

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Copyright, 1901

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Published by the VEDÂNTA ASHRAMA  
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.



"Even shouldst thou be the most sinful of all sinful (men), thou shalt by the raft of knowledge of thy Atman or Self cross over the whole ocean of sin."—*Bhagavad Gītā*, ch. IV., 36.

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## WHO IS THE SAVIOUR OF SOULS?

WHO is the saviour of souls? is a question of momentous importance in all the great religions of the world. Since the first dawning in human minds of the nature of the soul, this question has been asked and discussed by prophets and priests, kings and beggars, as well as by the inspired revealers of the sacred Scriptures. Various attempts have been made since the beginning of the religious history of the world to arrive at the right solution of this great problem. It is a question so deep in its nature that many advanced thinkers, philosophers and metaphysicians of all ages and climes have confessed their failure to arrive at any satisfactory solution. They have tried, but the conclusions they have reached have not been universally acceptable; indeed, as this is a problem to be solved by each individual soul, it is highly improbable that any particular solution can give satisfaction to all classes of minds. The question resolves itself into three divisions, each of equal importance: First. Who can really be called a saviour? Second. From what, and



in what way, is a soul to be saved? Third. What is the true nature of the soul? These three points must be understood very clearly before we are able to discuss the main question at issue; that is, Who is the saviour of souls?

Three great spiritual leaders of the world are worshipped to-day as the Saviours of mankind by the peoples of different countries. One was of Semitic origin, and the other two appeared amongst the ancient Aryans who inhabited India. The one is known as Jesus the Christ; the other two are Buddha and Krishna. Each of these Saviours is recognized by his followers as the Incarnation of God on earth. The followers of these Saviours worship their masters as God Himself. The general belief in India is that, like Jesus the Christ, Buddha and Krishna also possessed the divine powers of atoning for sins and of leading suffering humanity through different paths to the abode of eternal happiness and everlasting life.

As the followers of Jesus the Christ hope to be saved from sin and eternal suffering through their sin-atoning Master, so the followers of Buddha and Krishna expect to reach the highest ideal of life, the ultimate goal of religion, through the paths laid down by *their* divine Masters. Although each one of these is worshipped as the Saviour of the world, still the idea of salvation, the true meaning of the word salvation, and the methods of attaining to it are understood differently by the followers of each of these three great Incarnations. We all know that the Christians mean by salvation, redemption from sin, escape from eternal

punishment and the attainment of everlasting felicity in heaven through faith in Jesus the Christ who died for sinners.

According to the majority of Christian sects, each individual soul is born sinful, inheriting sin as his birthright. They accept the account of creation as given in Genesis and believe in the temptation and fall of man through the influence of Satan, the creator of evil. When the first man was created, he was made perfect and sinless after the image of the Creator; and then the evil spirit appeared on the scene and sowed the seed of evil in the fertile soil of Adam's soul. As that positive seed of evil grew into a tree and bore fruit, Adam's sin, the disobedience to the command of God, brought about his fall, punishment, suffering and death. The tree of evil did not die with the death of the first man, but it continued to grow larger and larger with innumerable branches until the whole world was covered with its shadow, sorrow, disease and death. The results of Adam's sin or disobedience to God's command have been reaped by his descendants from generation to generation for nearly six thousand years. At last, when the whole world was groaning under the burden of sin and suffering, the compassion of the Father in heaven was aroused and He showed how much he loved mankind. It is said God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son to save the souls of men. If that love had been shown a little earlier, how many thousands of souls might have been saved from sin and its consequent suffering! The ways of the merciful Father are mys-

terious and beyond human comprehension. Jesus the Christ came and sacrificed himself, taking upon his shoulders the burden of the sins of all humanity. His blood washed away all the sins of the world; and since then the world has become free from sin, suffering and death for those who accept this sacrifice and redemption. Of course these results are not to be enjoyed by unbelievers or heretics, but only by those who believe in Jesus the Christ as the Saviour of the world. Most Christians assert and believe that although Jesus the Christ died for all humanity, only those who come to him shall receive redemption from sin and go to heaven to enjoy celestial felicity. Those who, either through ignorance or perversity, fail to come under his banner, shall suffer for eternity. This is the explanation and solution of the great problem of the salvation of souls as understood and preached by the theologians and priests of Christendom and as popularly accepted.

The whole idea of Christ's being the Saviour of the world and of individual souls is most intimately connected with the theory that each individual soul is born in sin and is destined to suffer. Being born sinful, it has no power to save itself from the inevitable results of sin, which was committed, not by itself, but by the first man; consequently it needs the help of the innocent, holy Son of God, who came down from heaven to rescue sinful souls by taking upon himself the burden of their guilt and suffering its results in his own person. It is often said that before one accepts Jesus the Christ as the Saviour of souls he must believe that

he was born in sin; that the very nature of his soul is sinful; that he cannot redeem himself; that he has no power to obtain salvation save through external help, and he must have absolute faith in the theory of vicarious atonement: through that faith alone he will go to heaven and be free from all sin and suffering. No one is allowed to ask any question regarding any of these points; he must accept the doctrine or suffer the consequences. There is no other alternative.

This solution may bring comfort to many souls; it may solve some problems of life and be entirely satisfactory to those who can accept it. We do not wish to disturb the well-settled opinions and beliefs of those who are content with this explanation and who are not ready to ask questions or seek farther. But there are many others who do not wish to accept anything upon hearsay or because it is written in some book: who do not care to believe anything on external authority. Such minds have found this solution unsatisfactory, illogical and contradictory. Some of the best thinkers and philosophers of the world, as well as the advocates of modern science, have asked again and again "If God is infinite and all-pervading, where is there room for Satan?" "Who created Satan? Why did not God prevent the first man Adam from being tempted by that evil spirit? Why did He not protect him? Why should He punish an innocent man instead of the doer of evil?" How unkind and unjust must he be who punishes his own son for the faults of others! All these questions and many others have arisen again and again in the minds of thinking

people, driving them to discouragement and unbelief. To them we say: Friends, you need not despair; there is great hope for you; there is another solution of the problem which may appeal to your reason and bring comfort to your souls. That solution, standing on the rock of reason, science and philosophy, answers all questions and doubts, and may clear away all your difficulties. 31860.

First of all, let us examine carefully the origin of the idea of vicarious atonement. In ancient times, when primitive men were divided into classes, communities and tribes, each tribe had a tribal god; they believed that they could hold communion with these supernatural beings through prophets, priests, witches, or through oracles or inspirations. These tribal gods were numerous, as you will find, among the ancient Semitic tribes. The members of those communities believed that their tribal god was their ruler, protector, guide and friend; whenever the god was angry or displeased, then evil overtook them; whenever any misfortune happened or any disease fell upon them, they thought that it was the result of their god's wrath, and they tried to appease him by going to the priests or to some necromantic diviners, or to certain prophets, and then performing such acts as these sages directed. The priests usually told them to offer the most useful and valuable things to their gods. In this way gradually grew up the idea of offering sacrifices and prayers to their god, and thus bringing him to their side and appeasing his wrath. The main object, however, was to get rid of the miseries and sufferings of

**life.** Sometimes they offered things which could not be easily obtained; sometimes they sacrificed animals which were of great use to them; some tribes reached the climax by offering up human beings.

It was the custom amongst the ancient Jews to sacrifice human bodies before the altar of Jahveh. Nothing was of more value than a child; therefore the first-born child or animal or fruit of trees belonged to Jahveh and they gave it to him. Before offering these sacrifices the priests transferred the sins to the innocent animals, and when these animals were killed they had the belief that the blood of these innocent creatures would purify the souls of sinners and wash away the sins committed by the members of those communities. They used to sprinkle the blood of the sacrificed on the heads of the sinners, believing that they were thus made free from all sins. This custom still prevails in some parts of the world. There are tribes in India who sprinkle blood of sacrificed animals in the same way as we read in the Old Testament. This custom gradually developed into the idea of vicarious atonement; the blood of the innocent is the purifier of souls and the redeemer of the wicked.

In the whole world the Christian nations alone have kept up this theory of vicarious atonement. The Zoroastrians, Jews and Mahammedans no longer accept it. They try to be free from sins by following the commands of their God, obeying the Scriptures and living a righteous life.

As long as we believe in the special creation of man at some particular time by some extra-cosmic being,

in his temptation and fall, in the transmission and inheritance of sin as that of some positive thing like wealth or property; so long we are bound to believe that the individual soul is born in sin, that it has no power to save itself from punishment, that it needs help from outside; so long we are forced to accept the idea of vicarious atonement. Modern science has shown that this world was not created at any special time. The doctrine of evolution has thrown that theory into the background; so we are not obliged to accept the account as given in Genesis. Modern geology has proved that man appeared as early as the tertiary period, more than 10,000 years ago; therefore we need not concern ourselves about the temptation and fall of man, perhaps 4,000 years later. Satan is already entombed in the grave of the nineteenth century, so we need not talk about the inheritance of sin. First of all, we are not bound to inherit the sins of our parents; consequently nothing can force us to accept the theory of vicarious atonement. Let us throw aside all the dogmas and superstitious beliefs with which we have burdened our minds from childhood; let us forget for a moment that we are born in sin and that our nature is sinful. All such ideas do not bring any good to humanity; they make us more sinful; they keep us on the plane of sin and wickedness, because the power of thought is tremendous. "What thou thinkest, thou shalt become," is the saying of all sages. If we constantly think of ourselves as sinful, as born in wickedness, and to be punished eternally, then by the power of thought we make ourselves sinful. There is no hope

for us to be better until we forget these things. If I constantly think I am wicked, I keep myself on that plane. If I constantly think I am weak and diseased I bring disease on myself. Fixed thoughts and ideas which predominate in our minds, mould our inner nature and force us to act in accordance with those thoughts. The Christian Scientists and mental healers have found this to be true. They knew what an enormous power faith has. If I believe myself to be a sinner, "born in sin and shapen in iniquity", that belief intensifies all the evil propensities in my nature and makes it almost impossible for me to attempt their conquest. I know many people who have been brought up in institutions where it is taught that every individual soul is born in sin. The idea of a born sinner has become so strong in their minds that they can hardly imagine it possible for a soul to do good deeds without being helped by Jesus the Christ. They are frightened when they hear for the first time that God dwells within them. They cannot believe it; they will say: "How is it possible for God to dwell in the body of a sinner like me?" This is the effect of the training they get from their childhood; this degeneration of the human mind is the result of such training; it prevents the realization of truth; it keeps them back from the path which leads to perfection.

The fact is that we have not inherited the sins of our parents. Why should we inherit sin of another? Who can force us to inherit sins? Who compels us to inherit sin from father or grandfather? Did our parents create our souls? Have we sprung into existence



out of nothing? Did we come into existence from a state in which we did not have our individuality? Is this my first and last birth? No, it cannot be. Who can answer such questions? That we have inherited sins from our fathers may delude the ignorant minds of children; but no right-thinking persons can accept it as true. The truth is that our present lives are the results of our past lives. We are not the victims of the sins of our forefathers. We possess individuality quite distinct from them. We existed as souls before our bodies were born, and shall exist after the death of our bodies. Jesus the Christ said: "Before Abraham I was;" so it is with each individual soul. Each soul existed before Abraham was born, nay, before creation itself, and has been manifesting its powers from the beginningless past. Our present existence is a connecting link in the chain of our various manifestations. We are living in delusion, committing mistakes and reaping the results of those mistakes, and thinking that we are born sinners and are to be punished forever. 31866 .

One point we should remember: that as long as we think we are born sinners we are not approaching the true nature of our souls. If the innate nature of our souls be sinful, who can save us? It is impossible for anyone to change the innate nature of anything without destroying the thing itself. The innate nature of fire is heat; did you ever see fire exist without heat? Can fire exist, being separate from its innate nature? It is impossible. If the innate nature of the soul be sinful, then it can never exist as sinless. There is no

power in the universe which can change the innate sinful nature of the soul without destroying the soul itself. Consequently salvation of a sinful soul will be identical with the destruction or annihilation of it. Therefore such statements that we are born in sin, that the innate nature of our souls is sinful, are absurd, illogical and misleading. On the contrary, if we accept God as the Infinite Spirit, we cannot deny that He dwells everywhere. If that be the case, then God dwells within us, in every individual soul; who can prevent it? If you do not believe that, you do not believe that God is Infinite Spirit. If we once admit that Spirit is pure, sinless and divine, we are forced to the conclusion that the Spirit which dwells in us is sinless and divine. Infinite is always one. It cannot be many. How can the true nature or the Spirit in man, which is a part of the universal Spirit, be sinful, when God, the Infinite Spirit, cannot be corrupted by sin? How can the Spirit which dwells in the soul of each individual be called sinful? What right have you to teach your child that it is born a sinner; that it has inherited sin as its birthright? You have no right whatever. On the other hand, teach your children that they are pure souls, that the Divine Spirit dwells in each one of them, that God is within them. If your children imbibe such ideas from their childhood they will be more spiritual when they grow older; they will not have to unlearn anything. We all know how difficult it is to unlearn things which we have learned in our childhood. How many grown-up people ever succeed in unlearning the ideas with

which their tender minds were inoculated in childhood?

Teach your children such ideas as "The kingdom of Heaven is within you"; "I and my Father are one." That will be of great help to them. Do not accept the interpretations which you get from priests or books. First of all, learn the true meaning yourself and then explain it to them. If you do not understand the true spirit of Christ's sayings, wait for the explanation, and search within. The true meaning will come to you. That explanation will be true which is not bound by the limitations of the manners, customs, prejudices or particular beliefs of a particular race. The standard of truth is always universal. That explanation will be the true one which is not limited by books or dogmas, but which will harmonize with the truths discovered by all religions.

Jesus the Christ did not teach the idea of vicarious atonement; none of the great spiritual teachers of the world taught the dogma that we are born in sin and are going to eternal perdition. In India we do not find such teachings; from ancient times these ideas were never accepted by the thinkers, sages and philosophers. The most ancient scriptures of the Hindus are the Vedas; they do not teach it. On the contrary, the Hindu philosophers unanimously declare that each individual soul is immortal, pure and cannot be stained by sin. Ancient seers of Truth in India realized the unity and infinity of the Supreme Spirit, and the divine and sinless nature of the soul of man. They never preached the idea that the soul was created by some

being at a certain time; they never taught it to their children. If we read the Upanishads, there we find Vedic sages, after realizing the divine nature of the soul, declaring before the world: "Oh, ye children of immortal bliss, listen to me: I have discovered the truth; I have found the path. Know ye your true Self; that knowledge will light you across the ocean of death and sin." "Children of immortal bliss"; how full of sweetness, what a life-giving and heart-consoling expression!

One of the results of such teaching is that the Hindu mind cannot imagine why an individual soul should be thought to be born in sin. A Hindu mother never teaches her children such ideas. There was a Hindu queen who used to teach her children "*Tat twam asi.*" That thou art. That is, thou art the Eternal Spirit, the Infinite Spirit, the All-knowing Spirit, the Spirit that is free from sins and sufferings, which cannot be stained by sin. When she put her babe into its cradle she used to sing: "That thou art." "Thou art the Divine Spirit." As the child grew older it asked its mother the meaning of what it heard, and the mother said: "Go and find out the meaning." That impression created in the mind of that child was so strong that he afterwards became one of the great sages of India. If Christian mothers would teach their children in the same way, instead of telling them that they are born sinners and going to be punished, what a great blessing would it be to the children and to society. The number of sinners would decrease among the Christian nations.

There is no such thing as absolute sin; nor is it possible for one to inherit it like a piece of property. Sin is nothing but selfishness. Its cause is the ignorance of our true nature; as long as we do not know our real nature we remain selfish. If all individuals are born sinful, then why is it that sinful parents produce virtuous children? There are to be found many instances of this.

Here a question may arise: "If our true nature is divine, why are we not conscious of it? Why do we not know that the spirit which is dwelling within us is divine?" Because of our imperfect understanding, which does not allow us at present to see things as they are. We mistake the body for the soul and soul for body, matter for spirit and spirit for matter; we identify the changes of the body with the nature of the soul. We give all the attributes of the body to the soul; and if the body is diseased we think we are diseased and suffering. This understanding, being subject to evolution, gradually manifests in a better way and ceases to make mistakes as we rise higher in the scale of evolution. Mind and intellect are the medium through which the perfect and Divine Spirit within us is expressing its powers. The Atman or the Divine Spirit may be compared to the self-luminous sun and the medium of mind to space. When the mental space is covered with the thick and heavy clouds of ignorance, the light of the self-luminous Sun of the Atman or the Divine Spirit is invisible to the eye of the understanding. As the most powerful rays of the sun seem to us to be powerless and dull on a rainy

day, so the most powerful rays of the divine light of the self-effulgent Atman do not shine on the understanding when the heavy clouds of ignorance overhang the intellect. When ignorance covers the light of the spirit the understanding makes many mistakes. Just as in the partial darkness of twilight our eyesight is often deluded and we mistake a rock or a tree-trunk for a robber and are frightened, so in the darkness of ignorance our understanding mistakes the body for the soul, matter for spirit and *vice versa*. Then we suffer and cry for help. Through such mistakes we falsely identify ourselves with the limited medium of mind, intellect, senses and body, and attribute their qualities to our true nature. Then the Self-consciousness of the Atman or Divine Spirit in us becomes confused with those limitations. The result of this mixture is what we call ego and egoism or selfishness, or, in other words, the idea of "I and mine," "I am this or that," "I am born," "I am diseased," and so forth. The changes of the body, and the senses and modifications of mind are identified with our true nature, the Atman or Spirit. The appearance of this Atman or Divine Spirit as the limited ego is sometimes described as the fall of the divine spirit within the limitations of phenomenal existence. This appearance of the Absolute as relative individual ego through the power of ignorance is described in the Old Testament, in a crude mythological way, as the fall of Adam, the personified pure and perfect image of God. Ignorance is Satan. Through the influence of the magic power of ignorance or *Avidyâ*, or nescience, as it is called in Ve-

danta, the Eve or *Buddhi* or understanding is overcome. Then Adam, or Divine nature, or Atman, through the association of *Buddhi*, or imperfect understanding, falls from Paradise, i. e., appears as individual ego, losing for the time being the consciousness of the Absolute and becoming selfish and miserable. This, according to the teachings of Vedanta, is the spiritual meaning of the fall of man. The fallen ego will recover its absolute state through the help of the Atman which is described as Christ. This is the whole secret of true Christianity. The ego is the apparent, or selfish man. Buddha called this Atman, Truth, and the apparent man, soul. Who can save the apparent man except the Real man, or Atman, or Truth? There is no other Saviour of the soul from this attachment to body and senses, from the bondages of ignorance and their results; and the way of salvation is the knowledge of Atman, with the consequent surrender of the limited ego. If the soul, realizing its Divine nature, tells any unawakened soul: "Thou art spirit; thy true nature is divine"; then that true soul acts as the greatest friend and he is called the saviour of the unawakened soul. As the Incarnations of God, like Krishna, Buddha, Christ and others declared this truth to the world through their divine personality and power, they are called the greatest friends of mankind, the Saviours of the world. Still we must not forget through the zeal of our loyalty to and reverence for those great souls, that they merely point out the right paths to God-consciousness and that the true Saviour of the apparent ego is the Atman. Even the

great souls like Jesus the Christ could not bring into the right path—to God-consciousness—those who were not ready for such teaching. Think of what a small number of disciples Jesus left after so much sacrifice! What does it show? It shows that only those who feel the need of spiritual help can follow the example and teachings of the great soul, whether it be Christ or Buddha or Krishna or any other. They alone can attain to salvation or God-consciousness who are striving for salvation. No one can save you if you are not ready to be saved. When the individual soul dwelling in the darkness of ignorance, after committing many mistakes and reaping their results, after gathering experience in different planes of life, catches a glimmer of the light of Truth and struggles towards it; then, and then only, the divine light which is shining within is discovered; and Satan or Ignorance is conquered. Therefore Christ said: "Seek and ye shall find"; "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Buddha said: "The truth is noble and sweet; the truth can deliver you from evil. There is no Saviour in the world except the Truth. Have confidence in Truth, although you may not be able to comprehend it, although you may suppose its sweetness to be bitter, although you may shrink from it at first. Trust in the Truth." Where is that Truth to be found? [Not in temples, not in churches, or mosques, not in books or creeds or sayings of this or that prophet, but in the depth of your own hearts. Search within. It is the Atman, the Self, the Soul of our souls. There-



fore Vedanta says: "One should save himself by his own Self or Atman; never should one let himself sink in the ocean of birth and death. For Atman or Divine Self is the greatest friend and Saviour of the soul."









# VEDÂNTA PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE BY

SWÂMI ABHEDÂNANDA

ON

## THE RELATION OF SOUL TO GOD

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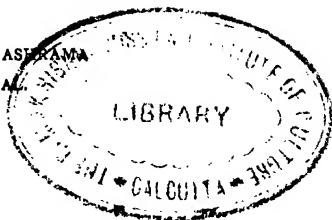
THIRD EDITION

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Published by the VEDÂNTA ASHRAMA  
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.





**"The soul enchained is 'man,' and free from chain is God."**  
**—*Life and Sayings of Ramakrishna*, by F. Max Müller, p. 145.**

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## **THE RELATION OF SOUL TO GOD.**

A clear understanding of man's relation to God is a matter of momentous importance to students of philosophy and religion and to all seekers of Truth. From very ancient times all the best thinkers, prophets and the great religious leaders of the world, whether of the East or of the West, have endeavored to explain our relation to God and to the universe. Out of those explanations arose various schools of philosophy and different systems of religious beliefs amongst the different nations of the world. Every philosophy and every religion, ancient or modern, has arrived at certain conclusions in its attempt to describe the relation which each individual bears to God. All such conclusions, of course, pre-suppose the existence of God, and depend upon the nature of our conception of God as well as of the human soul. Those who deny the existence of God and hold that we are but mere accidental appearances in the mechanical process of the blind forces of nature which are acting aimlessly upon dead matter, think that it is loss of time and energy to discuss such useless and absurd topics. They would rather devote their energy to obtain the best things of the Godless world for the comforts of



the soulless body. They do not believe in the existence of any such thing as soul, mind or spirit apart from body. When the body dies everything comes to an end. As with the body, so it is with the material universe. Such thinkers are not the products of the nineteenth century alone, but they are as old as the appearance of man upon earth. In ancient India this class of thinkers existed side by side with the believers in the individual soul of man and in God, as numerous as we find them to-day amongst the most cultivated minds of the West. Those ancient materialists, agnostics and atheists, making sense perception the standard of their knowledge of things, denied the existence of everything that they could not perceive by their senses. But the other class of thinkers, who went below the surface of the sense perceptions into the realm of the invisible, weighed their materialistic arguments, pointed out their fallacies, and ultimately established through logic and science, the existence of the individual soul of man as well as of the soul of the universe, or God, and described their mutual relation. These thinkers can be divided into three classes: First, the dualists; secondly, the qualified non-dualists, and thirdly, the non-dualists, or monists. The dualists believe in an extra-cosmic personal God, who creates the universe out of nothing, fashions it, gives names to the phenomena, and afterwards governs it. According to them, God, the creator and governor of the universe, is eternally separate from the universe and from all living creatures, just as a potter is separate from the pot he makes or as a carpenter who stands always outside

of the table or chair which he makes. The dualists believe in a God who has human attributes infinitely magnified. He is all-wise, merciful, just and all-powerful. Some of the dualists go so far as to give human form to God, as we find in the conception of Jehovah amongst the Hebrews and the orthodox Christians. In the Old Testament, Jehovah is described as walking with Adam in the Garden of Eden. It is said: "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (Genesis, iii, 8). Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel saw Him. The nobles not only saw but they did eat and drink. (Exodus, xxiv, 9, 11.) Moses saw Jehovah's back. Jehovah ate with Abraham under the oaks at Mamre. (Genesis xviii, 1, 8.) God was pleased with the sweet savor of Noah's sacrifice. He possessed human appetites. He walked with Noah, etc. The same Jehovah with a human form and human qualities and with a human personality is the ideal God of the orthodox Christian monotheists of to-day. They believe in Jehovah as sitting on a throne somewhere in the heavens with a right and a left hand, with eyes red with anger and revenge, and holding a rod, ever ready to punish the wicked with eternal fire. From many of the orthodox pulpits the same God is preached to-day, as He was in the days of the past. The relation of man to such a personal, or rather human God, with human attributes, is like that of a

subject to his king, or of a servant to his master. As the duty of a subject is to obey implicitly the commands of his king, or governor, or ruler, so every man's duty is to obey the commands of the Governor of the universe, otherwise he will be punished. Similar relation of man to the extra-cosmic personal Ruler of the universe is to be found in most of the monotheistic or dualistic religions of the world. All the religions of Europe and Asia which are dualistic or monotheistic teach that our relation to God is that of a creature to his creator, or of the governed to the governor.

Although man is said to be created in God's image in Genesis, yet it is generally understood that he cannot have any other relation higher than that of a creature to his creator. It simply means that man, being the image of God, possessed at first some of the divine qualities before he was tempted by Satan. Although the Christians believe that Jesus the Christ was the son of God, and God is the father of the universe, yet according to them, an ordinary mortal cannot be called the son of God in the same sense as Jesus of Nazareth was, because he was an exception to the general rule. Whether Jesus ever meant that he was the only begotten son of God exclusive of any other mortal, is a question yet to be solved. But the question is, if every individual be a true image of the son of God, why should God punish his own son so mercilessly with eternal fire as is described in the parable of the marriage of the king's son: "Then said the king to the servants, bind him hand and foot and take him away and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be

weeping and gnashing of teeth; for many are called but few are chosen." (Matth., xxii, 13, 14.) Again, in the saying: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matth., xxiii, 33.) Thus, according to popular Christianity, as it is understood and preached in the orthodox churches, man's relation to God is not that of His image or of a son to his loving Father, but of a subject to his despotic monarch, Christ being the only begotten son of God. As long as there is preached the idea of the creation of the universe and of man out of nothing by an extra-cosmic personal God with human attributes, so long will our relation to God remain like that of a creature to his creator or of the governed to his governor.

In India there are dualists, too. They believe in an extra-cosmic personal God who is the repository of all the blessed qualities, who is omnipotent, omniscient, all-loving; who creates the universe, not out of nothing, but out of the material of nature, which is eternal. God is the efficient cause of the universe and nature is the material cause. They do not believe that the human soul comes into existence all of a sudden and has a beginning, but that it existed in the past and will exist in future from eternity to eternity. They say that as nature is eternal so are individual souls. Each soul after remaining potentially in nature for some time, comes out of the causal state at the beginning of a new cycle of creation or evolution, and manifests in gross forms, one after another, according to its desires and tendencies, until it reaches perfection. After read-

ing the New Testament one cannot get any definite conception of the nature of the human soul, nor of its destiny, but in the dualistic system of India one learns that the human soul is like an infinitesimal particle of nature containing the divine light of intelligence and divine power in an infinitely small degree, whose duty is to serve God through prayers, good deeds, good thoughts and love. God loves all, and He can be loved in return. Those who worship Him through unswerving devotion and unselfish love obtain freedom from the dark side of nature; that is, from the bondages of ignorance, selfishness, suffering, misery and all other imperfections; and after death they live a life of perfection and bliss forever in the presence of the eternal personal God. This is salvation according to the dualists in India. They do not mean by salvation going to heaven, but on the contrary, hold that heaven is a place where one goes to enjoy the rewards of one's good deeds, and at the end of such a period of celestial enjoyment one comes back to earth and is born again. Each soul is bound to attain this salvation, sooner or later. Those who do wicked deeds reap the results of their actions and thoughts, not by going to any place of eternal fire and punishment, but by being born again and again until they reach the state of spirituality, devotion and righteousness. The monotheists in India do not believe that God punishes anybody, as He is the embodiment of divine love. Nor do they believe in eternal suffering, nor in any Satan or creator of evil. But they do believe in a temporary suffering of the wicked, which is the reaction of their own wicked acts.

They do not blame God nor charge Him with partiality, but they take upon their own shoulders the whole burden of responsibility. These dualists believe that wherever there is life there is the manifestation of the divine light of intelligence, however small it may be, however imperfect the expression of intelligence may be. From the minutest insect up to the highest gods, or angels, or bright spirits, each individual life is filled with a ray of that Divine Sun. They sometimes compare God with a gigantic magnet and the individual soul with the point of a needle, and say as a magnet attracts a needle so the great God attracts the individual souls toward Him through love, and magnetizes them by His divine power and love. Although they believe that each soul is separate from God and from other souls, yet its relation to God is like that of a ray to the sun or of a spark to fire. Their conception of the human soul is with attributes, with qualities and character, with mind, intellect, sense-powers, and the finer particles of ethereal matter which give foundation to grosser physical forms. In short, it is the same as the individual ego, as we call it, or the spiritual body as it is called in the New Testament. According to these dualists, God can be worshiped by man through various relations, such as by calling Him master, or father, or brother, or friend, or son, or husband. These relations depend upon the nature and characteristics of the worshiper. Some like to think themselves as servants of God, others as friends, or brothers, or sons. They say, as the same man in a household can be the master in relation to his servants, the father in relation

to his sons, a friend, a brother, or a husband in relation to his wife, so the same God can appear in all those various relations to different individuals according to their nature. Such is man's relation to God according to the dualistic thinkers of India.

Next to the dualistic conception of God comes that of the qualified non-dualists. These thinkers go a little deeper than the dualists. Starting from the dualistic standpoint they go a step further toward the realization of Truth and of man's relation to God. According to them, God is no longer extra-cosmic, no more outside of and separate from the universe, but He is intra-cosmic. He is no longer governor from the outside, but *Antaryamin*, inter-ruler. He is imminent and resident in nature. He inter-penetrates every particle of the universe. The physical universe is His gross physical body. He has infinite eyes, infinite ears, and infinite organs of other senses. He sees through the eyes of all the living creatures of the universe. He hears through all the ears that exist in the universe. He has infinite heads. The wind is His breath. His mind is the sum total of individual minds, or in other words, the Cosmic Mind. His intellect is the Cosmic intellect. His soul is the Cosmic Ego, or the soul of the universe. He is no longer the creator of the universe, or one who fashions the materials of nature and gives names and forms to the phenomena from outside like a carpenter or potter. He is not the efficient cause alone, as the dualists maintain, but He is both efficient and material cause of the universe. He creates, that is, He projects into the physical space

the phenomenal forms out of nature or divine energy which is in His body. He is the one living Being in the universe. He is the one stupendous Whole, and we are but parts. In that process of projection or evolution of nature, infinite numbers of individual souls which existed in His body from the beginningless past, come out on the physical plane, play their parts according to their desires, and fulfill their purpose through the process of evolution. Each individual soul is like a spark which emanates from the huge bonfire of God, and lives in and through God, but it cannot be called God. God dwells everywhere. He pervades the universe and nature, and yet He transcends them both. He is infinite but personal, without any human form. The qualified non-dualists say that God cannot be confined to any form, because every form is a limitation in space by time, while God is unlimited by space or time. He is beyond space and time. Our body is a part of God's body, our mind is a part of the divine or universal mind, our will is a part of the universal or cosmic will. This is called qualified non-dualistic conception of God, because it teaches unity qualified by variety. That is, God is one, the universe and human souls are one in God, yet each retains its own separate individuality. God is like a tree and we are like branches thereof. It reminds me of the simile of the vine and its branches which Jesus the Christ used to show man's relation to God. The same idea underlies His saying, "My Father is greater than I." According to this class of thinkers the individual soul possesses all the qualities of the human ego. As our ego



has mind, intellect, sense-power, memory, and is limited by other egos, so is the soul. After death the soul contracts its qualities within itself, and at the time of its birth it expands those latent powers. Our ego or soul is a part of the cosmic ego, or the soul of the universe, or God.

Next to these comes the class of monistic or non-dualistic thinkers. They do not stop where the qualified non-dualists have stopped, but they push their investigations still further, and analyze the nature of the individual soul or ego, and ultimately discover the unchangeable essence of the ego. They are the seekers of the unchangeable reality of the universe. In their search they will not stop until they reach that Truth which is immutable, eternal and one. They adopt the scientific methods of analysis, observation and experiment, and apply them to the subtlest and most abstract problems. Analyzing the nature of the ego, they find that it cannot be the unchangeable reality or immutable Truth, because the mind, with its various modifications, such as intellect, memory, etc., is constantly changing. After patient research and continuous struggle to know the ultimate Truth, these great monistic sages realized that the ego, or the individual soul, is nothing but a changeful receptacle of a still subtler substance, which is unchangeable and eternal. They called it the Atman in Sanskrit. There is no word in the English language which conveys the meaning of this Atman. It is much finer than ego or the living soul of the individual. Atman is the unconditioned reality in man; and

the living soul or the individual ego is the subtle covering of the Atman, like the globe that covers the light of a lamp. That Atman is not a part of the universal ego, but it is one with the unconditioned Reality of the universe, which is called in Sanskrit Brahman, or the All-pervading Spirit or the Absolute. Sometimes it is called Paramâtman, which was translated by Ralph Waldo Emerson as Over-Soul. It is finer than the Cosmic Ego or God. It is sexless, neither masculine nor feminine. It is sometimes translated by the Oriental scholars as the SELF. But Self is a confusing word. Some people mistake it for the Anglo-Saxon self, which acts and progresses, and which is another name for the ego. According to the non-dualistic conception of the true nature of man, the Atman or the Self, or the spiritual essence of man, is the same as the Brahman, the spiritual or divine essence of the universe. The relation of the true nature of man to God is no longer like that of a creature to the Creator, nor like that of a son to his father, nor like that of a part to the whole, but it is absolute oneness on the highest spiritual plane. The Atman, or the divine nature of man, is the same as the absolute divinity of the Cosmos. On that highest spiritual plane there is no distinction, no idea of separation, no idea of creation. All ideas of separateness, all differentiations of phenomenal names and forms, merge into the absolute ocean of reality which is unchangeable, eternal and one. The essence of the Creator is infinite, and it interpenetrates the phenomenal forms as the external space pervades every particle of atoms of the phenomenal world. That

essence is like the all-pervading background of the phenomenal appearances. Phenomena are like the waves in the ocean of Infinite Reality. Individual souls are like so many bubbles in that ocean of Absolute Existence. As a bubble rises on the surface of the ocean, takes a form, lives there, comes near other bubbles, lives in a group for some time, moves in the company of others, changes its size, perhaps, and goes down again; so the individual soul rises in that ocean of infinite existence, appears in various forms, passes through the different stages of evolution, and lives there for ever and ever, sometimes as manifested and at other times as unmanifested. The light of intelligence in the soul or ego is due to the reflection of the Atman or Divine Spirit on the mirror of the heart of the ego or soul. Therefore the soul is called the image or reflection of the Atman or Divine Spirit. This idea is beautifully expressed in one of the Upanishads: "In the cave of our heart have entered the two—the Atman or the Divine Spirit, and the individual ego or soul. Dwelling on the highest summit, or the ether of the heart, the one witnesses the other, while the soul drinks the rewards of its own works. The wise men and sages describe the one as the light, and the other as the reflection, image or shadow." (Katha Upanishad, ch. III, verse 1.) You will notice here what a deep meaning lies at the back of the expression, "Man is the image of God." The ancient Vedic sages used the same expression in a sense which many of the best philosophers of the Western world have failed to grasp or comprehend. Thus the most ancient Monistic

sages explained the highest relation of the individual soul to Atman or Divine Spirit, by calling it the reflection or image of the Self-effulgent Light of God. But as a reflection cannot exist independent of the light whose reflection it is, so the soul of man cannot exist independent of Atman. Therefore the true nature of the soul is Atman, the divine and real Spirit which cannot be divided into parts and is One Being of existence, intelligence and bliss. Such is the monistic or non-dualistic explanation of the relation of the soul to God.

Vedanta philosophy recognizes these three explanations. It says that the relation of the soul to God varies as the conception of the individual soul and God becomes higher and finer. Starting from the gross form of body, when a real and earnest seeker after Truth marches onward toward the Absolute, he passes through all the intermediate stages until he reaches that state of divine communion where he realizes the oneness of the Atman, or the true nature of man with Brahman, the cosmic Divine essence, or the Absolute Reality of the universe. Then, he says, I am Brahman, I am He, I am in the sun, in the moon, in stars; I am one with the All-pervading Reality; or as Jesus the Christ said, "I and my Father are one." He does not use the word "I" in its ordinary sense of ego or human personality, but in the sense of Atman, or Divine essence. Jesus was a dualist when He prayed to His Father in heaven, and he was a monist when He said, "I and my Father are one," "The kingdom of heaven is within you." A Vedanta philosopher or sage after

realizing that absolute oneness on the highest spiritual plane of the Atman, says, when he returns to the plane of relativity and phenomena:

“ O Lord, when I think of my body, I am Thy servant and Thou art my Master; when I look at my soul, I am Thy part and Thou art the one stupendous Whole; but when I realize my true nature, I am divine and one with Thee, the Absolute Spirit. Such is my conception of my relation to Thee.”

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#### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS AFTER THE LECTURE.

Does the soul exist after death?

Yes.

What is the difference between soul and spirit?

According to the Vedanta Philosophy, soul, or individual soul, or living soul means the ego. When spiritualists use the word spirit they mean the living soul or the ego. But this word is also used in a higher sense, and by spirit we mean the Atman, that is, the unchangeable basis of consciousness and intelligence. Consciousness or intelligence is the light which illumines our inner nature, and spirit or Atman is the source from which proceeds that light or consciousness. Soul or ego is the receptacle, as it were, of the spirit. It is the spirit plus mind with its various modifications. Mind includes all the mental activities, such as intellect, understanding, memory, emotion, power of perception, etc.

Does the Vedanta Philosophy teach Nirvana, or the annihilation of the soul?

No. On the contrary it teaches that the true nature of man is beginningless and endless.

What do you mean by Nirvana?

The cessation of all imperfections, and the attainment of perfection and freedom from the bondages of ignorance, selfishness, sorrow, suffering and misery.

Shall we lose our individuality after death?

No, we can never lose our individuality. We retain it through all eternity. As the Atman or our divine nature is eternal, so is our individuality.

Has the soul any form?

No. But it can take any form. The soul or ego is the invisible germ of life which contains within it mind, sense-powers, vital energy and the finer particles of ethereal matter. It is called subtle body, or spiritual body, as in the New Testament, when it appears in a certain finer form.

What is our divine nature?

The Atman or spirit. It is one with the Universal Spirit or the absolute reality of the universe. It is pure, sinless, immortal and perfect.

Does Vedanta teach that this world is an illusion?

No. It teaches that this phenomenal world is the objectified thought of God; that the universe is the result of the evolution of the one eternal energy which is called in Sanskrit Prakriti, the Latin Procreatrix, or Maya, meaning the Creative Energy or Divine Will. / Some translate Maya to mean illusion, not knowing its proper meaning. Maya never means il-

lusion. When a Vedanta philosopher says the phenomena are Maya he means that they are relative, conditional, and not absolute.

Was Jesus a dualist or a monist?

Jesus the Christ was a dualist when He said, "Our Father which art in Heaven." He was a qualified non-dualist when He said, "My Father is greater than I," and when He used the illustration of the vine and its branches. He was a monist when He said, "I and my Father are one," and "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." He recognized these three stages and explained them in these ways so that His disciples might comprehend.

What is the practical use of the Vedanta Philosophy?

The practical use of this philosophy consists in the knowledge of our true nature. It teaches us what we are, why we have come into this world, the purpose of life and how to fulfil that purpose, and how we can live as masters and not as slaves. Now we are living as slaves of our desires, slaves of our senses, attached to the transitory objects of this world. We are denying the real being of our soul and spirit, which are our true nature. By the help of the teachings of Vedanta we can become free from all these bondages, gain spiritual enlightenment and attain perfection in this life. Understanding these teachings helps us to manifest divinity through all the works of our everyday life and to love our neighbors as our true Self, which is divine and one.







# VEDÂNTA PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE BY

SWÂMI ABHEDÂNANDA

ON

# SPIRITUALISM AND VEDANTA

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FIFTH EDITION

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Published by the VEDÂNTA ASHRAMA  
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.



The Supreme Lord says:—"The votaries of the gods or angels go to the gods, to the ancestors go the ancestor-worshippers. The spirit worshippers go to the spirits; but those who are devoted to Me attain to Me and reach perfection."—*Bhagavad Gita, Ch. ix., 25.*

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## SPIRITUALISM AND VEDANTA.

MODERN spiritualism claims to have a supernatural origin, like all other great religions of the world which have been founded upon supernatural revelations. It has played its most important part in toning down the dogmas of Christian theology, in reforming the religious beliefs of the vast majority of the American people, and in starting fresh inquiries and investigations in the realm beyond the grave.

Within the last fifty years modern spiritualism has given wonderful demonstrations regarding the existence of disembodied spirits who continue to live even after the dissolution of their gross material forms, and has brought comfort and consolation to the hearts of many people who were suffering from the evil effects of scepticism and unbelief concerning a future life, caused by the dry theories of the atheistic, agnostic, and materialistic thinkers of the past century.

Through the help of modern spiritualism many of the educated and uneducated people of this country have now arrived at the conviction that there is such a thing as the human soul, a conscious entity which

continues to exist after the death of the physical body. Modern spiritualism has taught that the souls of the dead are not destined to suffer eternally, but that they are comfortably situated, and that they do not forget their earthly friends and relatives, but on the contrary, like guardian angels, they watch over their beloved ones and are always anxious to help them and protect them from the dangers and misfortunes that surround their earthly lives. Modern spiritualism has taken away the horror of the post-mortem condition of life, and has enabled human minds to look upon death as the threshold of that wonderland, the inhabitants of which enjoy new lives, new experiences, renewed pleasures and happiness. Thus, having established a belief in the life after death, modern spiritualism has claimed to lay the foundation of a religion under the direction of those spirits who have control over the mediums, or of those wise spirits who visit the spiritualistic séances, whether private or professional, with a desire to enlighten the minds of the sitters by imparting the knowledge of supernatural things.

The attempts of modern spiritualism to thus establish a religion upon the experiences gathered through the communications of departed spirits remind us of those ancient times when the primitive races were groping in the darkness of ignorance, when their minds were struggling hard to see a ray of light in that thick mist which veiled the realm beyond the threshold of death. In fact, the study of modern spiritualism leads us back to that age when the

religion of the primitive tribes consisted in keeping up the memory of their dead relatives and friends; when after seeing ghost-like apparitions of the deceased they came to believe that their ancestors were alive even when their bodies were mouldering in the grave. It also takes us back to that age when the principal form of worship was to please the departed spirits by doing such acts as they had liked most during their earthly career. This kind of ancestor-worship was the ancient form of spiritualism, and many scholars of modern times maintain that it was the beginning of all religions that are supposed to have a supernatural origin.

Ancestor-worship of course, as we all know, means a belief in the spirits of departed ancestors and in the supernatural powers which they possess, as well as our constant remembrance of them and our services in their memory, either by following their directions, or by seeking to rouse their sympathy and kindly feelings that they may help us during the distresses and misfortunes of our earthly lives. This ancestor-worship is to be found in almost all religions. After studying the ancient religions of different countries we find clear traces of this old form of spiritualism among the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Chinese, Parsees, Hindus, and other races inhabiting other parts of the world.

The ancient Egyptians, like the modern spiritualists, believed in departed spirits. Their idea was that within the physical body of man there was a soul having the shape of the gross body in every respect,

with similar hands, feet, and other limbs. It was like the double or the counterpart of the physical man. When the physical man died, his counterpart, or the double, went out of the body and lived. The life of the double, according to the Egyptian belief, depended upon the condition of the material body, that is, so long as the gross form remained intact, the form of the double would remain perfect, but if any part of the dead body was mutilated or injured, then the similar part of the double would also be injured or destroyed. It was for this reason that they cared so much to preserve the dead bodies by making mummies and building pyramids. This belief was the fundamental principle of the spiritualism and ancestor-worship of the ancient Egyptians.

The Babylonians and Chaldeans also believed in departed spirits, but not exactly in the same manner as the Egyptians. They believed in the wandering shade of the dead, which was called "Ekimmu," that is, a spectre. It was like the shape of the physical man with similar form; but they thought that it would meet with great misfortunes if the dead body were not buried with proper ceremonies, so they observed a great many ceremonies in order to make the departed souls free from all misfortunes. The Babylonians believed that the souls of those dead bodies which were not buried with proper ceremonies could not enter the house of the dead, called "Arallu," that is, the underground abode of the dead. It was like the Sheol of the Hebrews; therefore, the Babylonians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians took special care in

burying the dead. The embalming of the dead body, the building of monuments and tombstones, the decorating of them with flowers, wreaths, flags, and other grave-offerings, which are practiced to-day by the Christian nations in Europe and America, are but the remnants of the ancestor-worship of the ancient Babylonians and Chaldeans. These customs have been handed down to us, and we now blindly follow them without knowing their original meaning.

In the same manner it can be shown that the religion of the ancient Chinese was purely ancestor-worship. The Chinese have always believed in the spirits of their departed ancestors and relatives. They invoke them, seeking their help in time of need, and pray to them for welfare and prosperity. Even to-day the departed ancestors in China are honored with titles and praises for the meritorious acts performed by their descendants.

The ancient Parsees believed in the spirits of their dead forefathers and called them "Fravashis," or Fathers. According to their belief, the spirits of the righteous were raised to the rank of angels, arch-angels, and gods. The Parsees used to invoke them, praise them, pray to them, and ask help and blessings of them; they used to offer them food and other offerings in memory of the "Fravashis," or Fathers. Thus we see that ancestor-worship, or the ancient form of spiritualism, gave foundation to the religion of the Parsees as well as of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Chaldeans, and Chinese.

In Judaism, Christianity, and Mahometanism traces



of ancestor-worship have been discovered by modern scholars and the higher critics of the Scriptures. In the 28th chapter of I Samuel in the Old Testament we read that Saul went to consult with the witch of Endor, who had familiar spirits. At the request of Saul the witch invoked the spirit of Samuel, who appeared and gave him good counsels. The witches and wizards of the Old Testament were nothing more than the mediums of modern spiritualism. If the spiritualistic mediums of the present day had lived about four centuries ago, they would have been condemned by the Church as witches, and perhaps would have been hanged or burned at the stake.

The Hebrew word "Elohim," which has often been translated as God in the English Bible, was applied also to disembodied spirits. It is said that the witch of Endor saw Elohim ascending out of the earth; here "Elohim" was used in the sense of disembodied spirit of the dead. It was a kind of materialization of the departed spirits such as is to be seen in séances to-day. Do we not find a clear trace of ancestor-worship in Judaism when we read: "And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and did obeisance." (I Samuel, Chap. XXVIII, verse 14.)

The saint-worship among the Roman Catholics is another form of ancestor-worship, or a remnant of ancient spiritualism. If we go to Rome or to any other part of Italy, we see the statues of canonized saints over their tombs, which are decorated with flowers and lighted candles, and the spirits of those

saints are invoked with prayers and offerings. In fact, the beginning of the altars of churches and temples can be traced back to the graves of ancestors who lived righteous lives. The offerings and sacrifices in the name of God likewise originated in the belief that the departed ancestors had hunger and thirst just as they had when they were in flesh and blood. That which was at first the food and drink for the dead developed into the form of sacrifices. The Holy Communion, the offering of thanks, and the Eucharist of the Christians are only the relics of the ceremonies connected with the ancestor-worship or spirit-worship of the primitive people. Similar ceremonies still prevail among heathen races who have never heard of Christ or of his crucifixion. They were the spontaneous expressions of human minds which revered and honored the memory of their departed ancestors. The chants and praises which were used by primitive people to describe the virtues and the heroic qualities and deeds of their dead ancestors have gradually taken the forms of hymns of praise which are sung in churches and temples. Both Christ and Mahomet believed in departed spirits, saw angels ascending and descending over their heads, and received revelations through those who were but the spirits of the righteous.

In India from very ancient times the belief in departed spirits has played an important part in shaping the religious ideals of the Hindus. This belief found expression in the oldest scriptural writings of the Vedic period. As early as the time of the Rig

Veda, which goes back at least five thousand years before the birth of Christ, this idea was very common, and there we read many hymns with invocations addressed to the "Pitris," or departed Fathers. They were invoked, praised, and invited to accept the offerings made to them at the time of the Shrâddha. The Sanskrit word "Shrâddha" means anything done in the memory of departed ancestors. It includes prayers, praises, and offerings. One of the daily duties of Hindu householders is to spend a few minutes in thinking of their departed ancestors, and in doing some good works in their name. They will feed the poor and hungry, or give clothes to the needy, or make pilgrimages in the name of their dead relatives. The Hindu belief is that the fruits of such good works, when performed in the name of the departed spirits, will go to them and help them in their onward progress. All virtuous deeds performed by the relatives and friends of the departed ones in the name of their ancestors will surely bring good results to them.

According to the religion of the Vedanta, the souls of ordinary mortals remain "earth-bound" for some time after their death, and expect help from their relatives and friends who are left behind. Good thoughts and good deeds of the living help the departed spirits in obtaining release from the earth-bound condition, and thus they are enabled to rise higher and enter into the realm of the Pitris, Manes, or Fathers, in order to reap the fruits of the virtuous deeds done either by themselves or performed for

them or in their name by their descendants, friends, and relatives.

The realm of the ancestors is called "Pitri Loka," where the departed spirits of the ancestors enjoy heavenly life and celestial pleasures. This realm is ruled by the first of the mortals who through good works raised himself to that state of consciousness. He is called in Sanskrit "Yama." Those who have read Sir Edwin Arnold's "Secret of Death" are familiar with the word. Yama, the Ruler of the realm of the Pitris, Manes, or Fathers, bestows all comforts and happiness according to the deserts of those who reach that plane of existence. The realm of the Fathers, or ancestors, corresponds to the heaven of the modern spiritualists. To go there is the highest ideal of ancient ancestor-worship as also of modern spiritualism. Spiritualism, whether ancient or modern, cannot describe any stage beyond the realm of the Fathers. The religion which the modern spiritualists preach and claim as the true religion does not take us further than this belief that we shall meet our departed ancestors, friends, and relatives, rejoice in their company after death, and enjoy all the pleasures of life. The same ideal has been maintained by the ancestor-worshippers of all countries. The heaven of the ancestor-worshippers of ancient times is the heaven of the modern spiritualists. It is the realm of the Fathers. Many people may doubt its existence, but there is no reason for such doubts. Spiritualism leads human minds only a step beyond the grave in the world of phenomena and opens the

way to the belief in this realm of departed spirits. Where the ideal of ancestor-worship or the heaven of modern spiritualism ends, there is the beginning of the higher religion of Vedanta, which points out the path that directs the individual souls to the Eternal Truth which is beyond all phenomena, beyond heaven, above the realm of the Fathers, and even far beyond the reach of the angels or bright spirits or gods.

After ages of investigations into the nature of the life that one can possibly lead in the "Pitri Loka," the Vedantic Sages and Seers of Truth have discovered that the heaven of the Fathers is not the highest abode of Eternal Truth, that it is phenomenal and subject to the laws which govern the phenomenal universe; that the inhabitants thereof are bound by the law of Karma, that is, by the laws of cause and effect and of action and reaction, and that their stay on that plane is temporary, although it may last for thousands of years. The Vedantic Seers of Truth say that the ancestors, or Fathers, do not know the highest Truth, or the absolute reality of the universe, and being bound by desires, they cannot reach the plane of Divinity; consequently they cannot teach the Divine truths which they do not know themselves.

These ancient seers of Absolute Truth, having realized through their own experience that the inhabitants of the spirit world, or the heaven of the ancestors, or the realm of the Pitris, do not and cannot know the highest Truth on the plane of Divinity, and that, therefore, they cannot teach others, have warned their disciples, followers, and seekers after truth in

general not to waste their time and energy in seeking spiritual help from those departed spirits who have no knowledge of truths that exist beyond the world of psychic phenomena, and who do not possess the power of helping any seeker after Divine realization.

Disregarding such wise warnings, the American spiritualists of modern times have been spending their time and energy and wasting their money in the vain hope of gaining the favor of those departed spirits, of learning the mysteries of life and death from them, and of solving the problems which trouble most human minds. Modern spiritualists claim to establish the foundation of a true religion upon the imperfect knowledge derived from the communications of the foolish, deceitful, idiotic, and ignorant earth-bound spirits who control the mediums and pretend to know everything regarding the realms beyond death. The students of Vedanta often wonder how sensible men and women can sit in public séances night after night and listen with great admiration and rapturous attention to the senseless prattle of ignorant spirits who are supposed to control the weak minds of the mediums.

Having spent some time with the mediums of all kinds that exist in America, I wish to say a few words regarding my experience. I have been invited by the spiritualists to speak for them, and to attend their séances. I have accepted their invitations with great pleasure in order to make some investigations for my own satisfaction. I have seen many materialized spirits and have spoken with them. I have had long conversations with some who spoke through tin

trumpets, and have asked them many questions; but I have not found a single spirit in any séance, nor a single medium, who could answer my questions satisfactorily. I have asked them about the life after death, the origin of the soul, the true nature of the soul, its relation to the Universal Spirit, etc.; such questions, however, have never been answered by them; on the contrary, on many occasions they have confessed their ignorance, and have said: "We do not know; you know better than we can tell you." Some spirits have often referred to me for my approval of their answers to the questions which they were asked by other sitters. A few years ago I was amused to hear from the spirit-control of a materializing medium in a public séance: "Oh, here is a thinking-box; what can we say before him?" This exclamation came from an American Indian spirit. I was sitting next to the husband of the medium, and, as he was a friend of mine, I asked him the meaning of such a remark. He said, "She refers to you." I inquired, "Why?" He replied, "She thinks you are very wise, and she cannot show her power." And I am sorry to say that the séance was not successful that evening.

On another occasion I had a long talk with a spirit, and asked her many questions regarding the mode of living in the spirit world, and her answers to my questions were perfectly idiotic. The spirit said she went to schools and studied books. I asked, "What books do you read? Can you mention the name of any book you read?" "No," she said, "I do not know the names."

Sometimes, however, I have noticed that telepathically my own thoughts, my own ideas and very expressions were reproduced as perfectly as if I were answering my own questions. I was also pleased to hear the remarks which the spiritualistic mediums made after hearing my discourse on "Reincarnation." Some of them congratulated me, and said: "My spirit-guides have taught me exactly what you have explained." But other mediums did not like the idea of reincarnation at all, because they had not learned it from their spirit-controls.

Supposing all the phenomena of spiritism to be true and genuine, what have the spiritualists gained by these communications, outside of the satisfaction of their idle curiosity? Have they learned any of the higher truths? Have they understood any of the laws that govern the spiritual nature of man? Have they known why human beings come to this earth, and why they go away suddenly? I have asked many of the mediums, as well as their spirit-guides, and have found that they do not know anything regarding the origin of the soul. Their answers are always based upon the dogmas of Christian theology which they learned in their childhood in Sunday-schools. They say: "God creates the soul at the time of birth, and the soul continues to exist forever." If one asks, "How do you know that the soul did not exist before the birth of the body?" they do not answer.

Although many of the spirit manifestations and spirit communications have been exposed as fraudu-



lent, and many of them can be explained by telepathy and thought-transference, still there are some genuine phenomena which cannot be explained by any other theory than that of the communication of disembodied spirits. On many occasions the audience is fooled by the spirits, some of whom are neither wise nor truthful. In some cases they take the appearance of some other spirit and deceive the sitters. The poor, innocent mediums may not know that such tricks are played upon them by their dishonest spirit-guides; they are not to be held responsible for the fraud in many cases; the spirits are to be blamed. Therefore, how can we expect to learn the Absolute Truth from these spiritualists whose controls and guides themselves are ignorant, deceitful, and not wiser than the mediums. Vain is the hope of those spiritualists who expect to know the Absolute Truth through communications from earth-bound spirits. In India the seekers after the Absolute Truth do not go to any spiritualistic medium to obtain knowledge of the soul or of God, because they are taught from their childhood that the spirits who do communicate with ordinary mortals through mediums are ignorant and earth-bound. They need our help more than they can help us in any way.

These seekers after truth do not seek wisdom from the Fathers or departed ancestors, because they know that the inhabitants of the spirit world, or heaven, or "Pitri Loka," the realm of the Fathers, are not perfect; but that they go there, being bound by desires, to enjoy the fruits of their good works for some time, and

at the expiration of that period are forced to come down from that plane to this world; that eventually they are bound to reincarnate as human beings in order to fulfil the other human desires which are latent in them, and to reap such results of works as are to be obtained on the human plane alone. No individual remaining on the plane of human desires can escape this wheel of birth and rebirth which covers all the stages between the highest heaven on one side and the earthly existence on the other. So long as desires remain in us, we are bound to go through changeful conditions and existences and meet such environments as are subject to change. Those who enter into the heaven of modern spiritualists are similarly subject to the laws of Karma or of cause and sequence and of action and reaction. Being bound by that law, they must remain there until they have reaped the results of their good deeds and good thoughts. They will then come down to this earth and will be reincarnated again as human beings in order to satisfy their human desires and human tendencies on the human plane. Cycle after cycle the individual souls remanifest themselves on different planes of existence in accordance with their thoughts, desires, and works. They may go to the heaven of the Pitris, or ancestors, or any other higher realm of the spirits.

Having understood this grand law of Karma, the Vedanta philosophers and the seekers after Absolute Truth in India searched for that subtle path by which the individual soul can escape the wheel of rebirth

in this world, and transcend all laws and all the stages of the phenomenal universe, from the heaven of the spiritualists and ancestor-worshippers up to the highest realm of the Devas or gods. In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord says: "Even the inhabitants of the highest heavens are subject to the laws of rebirth and reincarnation. He alone is free from birth and rebirth and transcends all phenomena who, after knowing the Absolute Truth, after realizing the Supreme Spirit, becomes one with the Divinity."

The path which leads to the realization of the Absolute Truth, to the abode of the eternal and unchangeable Reality of the universe is different from that which leads to the realm of the Fathers, or the heaven of the spiritualists or of other dualistic religions. The entrance into the heaven of the ancestor-worshippers depends upon good and righteous works; it comes as the effect of good thoughts and good deeds. But the performance of good works and good thoughts cannot produce as their result the attainment of God-consciousness, or that freedom or divine realization or Absolute Truth which is the highest ideal of all religions. No amount of good thoughts and good deeds can produce as their effect that which is beyond thoughts and mind, and consequently beyond the reach of their effects; because divine realization is not within the realm of psychic phenomena, nor can it be reached by mind, intellect, or sense powers. And the path which leads the individual soul to the realization of the Absolute is neither through righteous works, nor through the belief in departed spirits, nor by the

worship of the spirits of ancestors, but through self-knowledge and the knowledge of the relation which the individual soul bears to the Universal Spirit. That path is called in Vedanta "Devayâna," the Divine path, or the path which leads to Divinity. The travelers on this path are those who are the most sincere and earnest seekers after the Absolute, who do not care for phenomena, whether physical or psychic, whose souls soar high above the clouds of desires that cover the light of the spiritual sun in ordinary mortals; but whose highest aim, loftiest aspiration, and deepest longing of the soul are to realize that unchangeable Truth which is beyond mind, beyond intellect, which the Fathers in the heavens of the spiritualists cannot reach. We must go there in order to find the correct solution of all problems concerning life and death. True religion does not depend upon any of the psychical phenomena that are to be seen in séances, nor is it based upon ancestor-worship; therefore the religion of the Vedanta tells us not to seek divine wisdom from departed spirits, not to waste our time and energy by going after them, because the result will not be successful. The spiritualists who seek the highest wisdom from communications with departed spirits are deluded; they do not know the limitations of those earth-bound souls.

Such earth-bound souls may take the form of a great wise man or a sage and appear in a séance and pretend to give the highest truths, but sensible persons will easily find out how deceitful some of them are. We must be very careful in dealing with the spirits.

I have seen people who, after investigating spiritualism and seeing all these phenomena, have lost all faith and have become atheistic in their ideas. The modern spiritualists are like babies in this line of thought. The seekers after truth in India have searched and gained experience for thousands of years in studying the characters of the earth-bound as also of the higher spirits. The Hindus do not allow anyone to become mediumistic; they say that those who go into that condition are committing a great psychological crime, by making their own minds and bodies, which they have gotten for their own development, subject to the influences of other spirits for the fulfilment of their desires.

We know that mediums are more or less moral and physical wrecks in the end. If spiritualism can enlighten the minds of people as they claim, why do we see that many of these mediums are ignorant and idiotic? They do not understand the moral and spiritual laws that govern our souls. They have lost the power of self-control; they cannot control the trance-like condition when their animation is suspended and their mind, brain and the whole body are at the mercy of another power outside of themselves.

The will power of the mediums is weak; their vital energy, their life force and their intellectual powers are used by other spirits which have control over them. Once I asked a good materializing medium, how she felt after coming out of the mediumistic condition? She replied: "I feel as though there were nothing in me, as if all vitality and life had been taken out of me,

all empty inside. I cannot think or do anything for some time." Is not this a pitiable condition? It is for this reason that in India the Hindus do not encourage anyone to become a medium. On the contrary, if they find a person going into a mediumistic condition, they make strong efforts to bring him out of it. These earth-bound souls who are trying to get possession of weak-minded mortals are delighted to find anyone who seeks their help.

The genuine phenomena of spiritism may do some good in the way of satisfying the curiosity of certain people, or of bringing the assurance that there is a life after death; they may foretell some petty, trivial events in connection with our business or daily life, but they cannot bring to us the highest wisdom and happiness which come to the soul through Divine Communion. These spirits are not angels, as the spiritualists claim, but they are in reality earth-bound spirits. Modern spiritualism may encourage the hope of meeting the departed spirits of our friends and relatives, and may bring consolation in the minds of those that doubt their existence, but it cannot give us the realization of the Absolute Truth or the attainment of God-consciousness; it cannot lift us above the realm of the Fathers or the ancestors who are dwelling in the "Pitri Loka." The aim of the religion of the Vedanta, on the contrary, is to make the individual soul realize its own true nature, to bring its reunion with the Universal Spirit and to transform it into the Divine Being, which transcends all the limitations of time and space, all the laws which bind us to this earthly plane. The

aim of the religion of the Vedanta is to make us realize the Eternal Truth in this life, and be perfect as the Father in Heaven is perfect.

The attainment of God-consciousness is the highest ideal of Vedanta. It shows the way by which we can reach the ultimate goal of all religions, manifest divinity in the actions of our daily life, and becoming free from selfishness and independent of physical and mental conditions, how we may live as a living God. For this reason, it is said in Vedanta: "You may read the scriptures or repeat scriptural passages day after day; you may offer sacrifices, prayers and invocations to the spirits or angels for help, or worship the spirits of departed ancestors for wisdom and knowledge; but so long as you do not realize the true nature of your Self, so long as you do not feel that reunion of the individual soul with the Universal Spirit, you shall not attain to spiritual freedom and perfection."

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# VEDÂNTA PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE BY

SWÂMI ABHEDÂNANDA

ON

# SIMPLE LIVING

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THIRD EDITION

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## SIMPLE LIVING.

**THE** ideal of simple living, which is now considered to be of great value even in a commercial country like America, has been held in the Orient from time immemorial as the best means of attaining to perfect peace and happiness on earth. Unlike the inhabitants of the Occident, the Orientals do not maintain that complex living, accompanied by enormous material possessions, is the highest end and aim of earthly existence. In the Occident the vast majority of people live the most complex and artificial lives with a view to enrich themselves with as much as they can gain during their life-time, to multiply the number of their needs as much as possible, and then to struggle hard for their gratification. Unrestrained passions, uncontrolled desires and insatiable greed for the possession of more luxury, more comforts and more pleasures drive the occidental mind to the abyss of worry and anxiety and bring on numerous diseases and untimely death. Constant rush and competition, accompanied by diseases of the heart, of the lungs, kidneys, brain and of the whole nervous system, are the outcome of the hard struggle for existence in a civilized country like America. These are the evils

of modern civilization, the ideal of which is luxurious living and the most complex and artificial standard of social life.

Wherever we cast our eyes in this commercial capital of the United States, we find people from the lowest to the highest classes of society, groaning under the burden of overwork, hurry, unrest, disease, worry and anxiety. The poorer classes hold the ideal of life of the middle classes, for the middle classes the rich man is the ideal, the multi-millionaire is the ideal of the millionaire, and so on it goes. Even when a man possesses millions and millions, he is not satisfied; he wishes to possess the wealth of other countries, of other nations, and the longing is so great that if a man possessed the wealth of the world, even then he would not be content; he would try to reach the moon and divide it if possible. Everyone is struggling day after day and night after night to earn more and to spend more, to keep up the style and fashion of the day (to be in the swim, as people say), by fulfilling the unnecessary demands of society or by getting worthless things which appear attractive to their senses and which make them think that without them their life will not be worth living.

I was reading not long ago in the papers that the Bishop of London, who receives ten thousand pounds or fifty thousand dollars a year, wants more. He thinks himself very poor, and he is poor because his demands are so many; therefore he wants more. There are many bishops in this country who think in

the same way. The man who has two meals a day wants three; he who can afford two courses at dinner wants four, then six. He who eats bread and butter with a few vegetables, wants meat; when he gets meat, he wants poultry; when he gets chicken, he wants goose, then turkey. The man who drinks cold water has beer as his ideal; when he gets beer, he wants claret, then champagne. Poor men and women who have no roof over their heads, at first long for a shelter, and when some kind person offers them the shelter of a house, they are not satisfied; then they want clothes; when they get simple clothes, they want expensive garments; after a time they begin to covet all kinds of luxury; then they wish to go to concerts, theaters and other amusements; when they get these even, they are not satisfied, for then they desire to climb the social ladder and be somebody of importance. But they will not stop here; they will seek to associate with the nobility of other countries. Such is the innate longing of those who hold luxurious living as the highest aim of their earthly career! They do not think of anything else; they do not see or know the moral and spiritual laws that govern our lives; they do not try to understand those laws. How can they expect to be happy and peaceful when the canker of the constant demand for more and more is eating up their vitality and destroying the moral and spiritual ideals of their souls? The vast majority of people live to eat and drink, to wear costly garments and to enjoy all the luxuries and

amusements which they can possibly get. They bequeathe these insatiable desires to their children, who go on living in the same way, following the example of their parents. They have never been taught the precepts of simple living. They have never been told that the more we gratify our needs the more they increase; that the question of food, shelter and clothes becomes more absorbing than ever when we are better nourished, better clothed and better housed; for the desire for food and clothes you will always find most predominant and strongest in those who are well fed and well dressed. Along with this increase of needs and desires, our mode of living becomes complex, because the simple methods of earning a simple living will not be enough to fight against the devil of competition which is perpetually trying to crush within its formidable jaws all those who are simple and innocent.

Immorality, vice and crime are the constant companions of a complex life. So long as we are governed by our desires, passions and needs, we are their slaves and we struggle to serve them as our masters by adopting any means fair or foul. We do not see the moral and spiritual laws which govern our higher life; for the time being we are satisfied with the animal cravings of existence, above which hangs a thick veil hiding the view of the moral and spiritual truths. Hypocrisy, lying, deceit, treachery, vanity, self-conceit, ambition, avarice, malice, thirst after sense pleasures, jealousy, hatred, selfishness, lust, disputes and quarrels

dominate over the minds and souls of those who are enslaved by abnormal greed and countless needs and who live a complex life. These are the evil qualities that debase the character of one whose living is not simple.

A civilization which encourages these evils, which does not enoble the individual character of the masses and does not give opportunity for carrying out the loftiest moral and spiritual ideals in practical life, is not worthy of its name. The evil effects of such a so-called civilization, which is founded upon commercial principles, are appalling. True civilization, on the contrary, which is based upon moral and spiritual standards, must reform the inner nature of the individual, must make him lead a simple life and obey the moral and spiritual laws of a higher plane of existence.

What good can be obtained by putting the most costly garments upon the body of a ferocious tiger or a filthy beast or a venomous snake in human form? What will be the use of the palatial dwelling of a multi-millionaire if its atmosphere be corrupted by immorality and indescribable vices? What good will be done to humanity or to a nation by the luxury and comforts of a Royal brute who claims the wealth of half the world, if he be immoral, if he remain a slave to passions and needs, if he cannot set an example of simple living before the world?

Occidental civilization has solved the problem of complex living and has given a great lesson to hu-



manity. The civilization of India, on the contrary, old as it is, has solved the problem of simple living and has answered the question of how much less a man really needs to live a healthy, chaste, moral, unselfish and spiritual life. This question seldom arises in the West where simple living is equivalent to poverty, and poverty in turn is considered to be a curse of God. In India, however, there are thousands who look upon poverty as a great blessing, because it reminds one of God and uplifts the soul above the plane of the senses.

Let us pause here a moment and ask within ourselves, How much of material things do we really need to live under the best conditions? Good nourishing food to satisfy natural hunger, pure water to drink, a simple garment to cover the body and protect it from heat and cold, a sanitary dwelling place, pure air to breathe and outdoor exercise? How many of us here will be perfectly contented with these? How many of us will stop worrying and fretting if we possess these in abundance? What else do we need to keep perfect health and peace of mind? Why shall we have to worry about our health if we live under these conditions? Nature has given us health, but we violate her laws. Nature has supplied us with plenty of pure air and water, which are the most vital things for our earthly existence. Nature also produces an abundance of food which perfectly nourishes the body and preserves health, both physical and mental. When these simple

products of nature can sustain our life and bring peace in our minds, why are we not happy? Because of our desires. We create new tastes according to our desires. We do not want merely to nourish our bodies, but to nourish our vanity, ambition, egotism, selfishness, and animal tendencies. It is for this reason that we need so many other things. Being enslaved by them, we foolishly consider them as parts of our being, as indispensable as food and air. Lower animals have one fixed kind of food for each species, but for animals in human form there is no fixed food. Each has created a peculiar taste according to his or her desire and means. Some live entirely upon fruits and nuts, some on vegetables, others on cereals; some need meat, animal flesh; while there are many who cannot live without pounds of beef-steak and gallons of coffee and liquor. There are some again, animals in human form, who may be called omnivorous. I do not mean to start any kind of food reform; there are a number of cranks who earn their living by introducing such reforms, and I do not wish to be classed with them. But I want you to understand how the tastes of different people vary according to their ideas and desires. We create our tastes and then say that we cannot live without them. I remember when I first came to London, my friends wished me to drink coffee. I could not drink it because I had drunk only pure water in India. It required a long time for me to get into the habit of relishing coffee and then I learned that it was

nothing but an acquired taste. There are various other things which we constantly eat and drink, for which the taste has been cultivated artificially; naturally we do not need those things. When we understand why these things have become necessary to us we can go without them. Many people whom I know have given up coffee, tea and animal flesh and they are enjoying perfect health.

Simple living does not cost much; it does not depend upon slaughter-houses and saloons. How many thousands and thousands of innocent animals are killed every day to fill our needs and satisfy our appetites! Each stomach has become a cemetery and every tooth stands like a tombstone. But think of the humanitarian principles and absolute unselfishness of the millions of Hindu peasants and farmers who, dying of starvation during the terrible famine, shared their last morsel with the cattle but never raised a knife to kill them for food. In India the Hindus would not slay these poor dumb creatures even when they themselves were dying of starvation, because they consider the life of an animal just as important as their own life; they would rather sacrifice their own life. Some people may think them very foolish; of course they were foolish from the standpoint of beef-eaters. If you wish to judge them, then look at them from the humanitarian standpoint. Each one must be judged by his own standard. The standard of simple living cannot be judged by that of complex living. In India it is not necessary to

preach simple living, for the vast majority are like the personification of simple living. There were no slaughter-houses, no saloons in India, but occidental civilization, which is built upon such luxuries, has been introducing these vicious habits among the people of India, whose ideal has always been simple living.

No other nation can teach the Hindus how to live a simple life. The Occidentals will have to sit at the feet of the Hindus to learn this lesson. The Christian missionaries go to India to set an example of their complex life, glorifying it as the result of their religion, but forgetting at the same time that the Founder of their religion was an Oriental, consequently, like other Oriental spiritual teachers, He lived a simple life and preached among His disciples the ideal of simple living, without thinking of the morrow, but always trusting in the Heavenly Father who is ever ready to feed His children. He said to His disciples: "Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matt. vi, 26). "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment?" (Matt. vi, 25). True followers of Christ are those who live a simple life without thinking of the morrow; not those who live a complex life and profess to be Christians. You will

find many true disciples of Christ among the so-called heathen of India and very few among the so-called Christians of the Occident.

Those who lead a simple life are the salt of the earth; they are blessed. In India a man or woman who has the smallest needs is considered to be nearest perfection; he is, therefore, the ideal of the nation, he is divine. Kings and princes and multi-millionaires have renounced their thrones, their palaces, wealth and luxuries for the sake of simple living. They hold that as the highest ideal. You will find hundreds of instances of young and old, men and women, who strive to curb their desires in order to live the simple life. How many Americans can do it, I wonder?

But simple living does not mean a life of retirement. It does not mean that we must go out of the world and live in forests and caves, but it means absolute obedience to the laws which govern our physical, mental, moral, and spiritual being. The violation of these laws leads to complexity of living which produces disease, unrest, suffering, vice, ignorance, slavery to passions and the worship of mammon.

Simplicity is the purpose of nature. Nature has made human beings for the fulfilment of a certain aim and purpose of life, which cannot be fulfilled in any other grade of the evolutionary process. When we have understood that aim and have manifested it in and through the acts of our daily life, then we are worthy of being called human. A human being

who lives a complex life is neither human nor animal; he is a mixture of the qualities of a dozen or more lower animals of different species. He is indeed a peculiar being! So long as a man is guided by animal propensities and is a slave of passions, desires and needs, so long he has missed the mark and is far away from the right path which leads to the perfection of humanity. That perfection lies in self-mastery over mind and body. Self-control, which includes the control of passions, needs and animal tendencies, must be at the bottom of simple living. Wherever there is simple life, there is to be found the manifestation of absolute self-control. It is the greatest of all virtues; and wherever there is the expression of self-control, there is to be found the expression of love, sympathy, fellow-feeling, justice, truthfulness, freedom, moral and spiritual powers. Therefore, by simple living we do not mean merely outward simplicity in clothes, a modest dwelling and vegetarian food, but we mean the exercise of self-control, which makes one live as a master over nature and not as a slave of passions, desires and needs. Simple living is not equivalent to poverty, nor does it mean ignorance. It comes through the proper education of the mind, which enables us to understand the moral and spiritual laws governing our higher being and reveals the highest purpose of life. It is the result of the highest education, the moral and spiritual training of the soul. It does not mean miserliness, which is produced by extreme attachment to wealth. Out-

wardly a miser may live in a very modest way because he is afraid of spending money even for himself, and at the bottom of that fear you will find extreme selfishness and attachment. Simple living makes one unselfish and brings unselfish love for others. It inspires us to love and feel for others just as we love and feel for ourselves. Furthermore, it makes one compassionate and charitable towards all. It purifies the heart and rouses the spirit of self-sacrifice for the good of humanity.

Simple living includes sincerity in thought, word and deed. The thought of the mind stands at the back of all words and deeds. Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh and the hand worketh. Simple and sincere thought always helps the thinker as well as the person toward whom it is directed. We must not think too much of ourselves; we must not try to enrich ourselves at the expense of others; we must not think ill of others or scheme to deprive others of their wealth and possessions for our benefit, but we must feel happy when we see our neighbors happy and prosperous. We must send good thoughts toward relatives, friends, neighbors, countrymen, all humanity, towards all living creatures. We must recognize that all living creatures are related to that one stupendous *Whole* of which we are but parts, and that, therefore, they are related to ourselves as our true brothers and sisters.

God is the simplest Substance of the universe; there is no complexity in Him. When we direct our

thoughts towards Him and feel His presence in our hearts, then our thoughts become simple. And as the Supreme Being dwells in the hearts of all creatures, we must realize this truth and learn to direct our thoughts toward the same Divinity dwelling in others. This simplicity of thought will bring perfect peace and happiness and eventually will make us divine and perfect. Simplicity of thought will manifest itself in speech and act. We must not use unkind words that will injure and wound the feelings of others; our words should be like a benediction to all. Simplicity of speech and truthfulness go hand and hand. Truth is the simplest thing in the world. Falsehood alone requires complexity of speech. Simplicity in acts will be established when we shall not perform any act which will injure others physically or mentally. Thus being and becoming simple in thoughts, words and deeds, we should live in the world performing the simple duties of life, seeking simple and innocent pleasures which will not debase our character or increase our appetite for enjoyment and our attachment to the transitory objects of the material world. We shall then enjoy the true blessings of life at every moment, if we do not forget to exercise self-control over passions, desires and needs. Simple living will enable us to adapt ourselves to all conditions of life; then change of circumstances will not wreck our nervous systems or drive us into the insane asylum.

He who lives a simple life is a friend of humanity



like Jesus the Christ. He lives for others, and whatever he performs with his body he gives as a free offering to the world; he holds his life to sacrifice it upon the altar of humanity. His life is a blessing to the world. He is the ideal of mankind. He is not only a true friend of humanity, but also of lower animals, like Buddha, the Enlightened, who offered his body to save the life of a goat that was about to be sacrificed upon the altar. He not only feels for animals but for all living things like Bhagavân Sŕî Râmakrishna, who could not walk on the grass and who suffered at the sight of anyone else walking on the grass or breaking a leaf or the branch of a tree, because he felt as one with the Universal Being who pervades all animate and inanimate things. Such is the effect of true simple living; it makes one perfect even in this life as the Father in Heaven is perfect.









# VEDÂNTA PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE BY

SWÂMI ABHEDÂNANDA

ON

## WHY A HINDU IS A VEGETARIAN

DELIVERED BEFORE THE VEGETARIAN SOCIETY,  
NEW YORK

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SIXTH EDITION

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"Who can be more cruel and selfish than he who increases the flesh of his body by eating the flesh of innocent animals?"—*Mahabharata*.

"Those who desire to possess good memory, beauty, long life with perfect health, and physical, moral and spiritual strength, should abstain from animal food."—*Ibid*.

"Highest virtue consists in the non-killing of animals."—*Ibid*.

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## WHY A HINDU IS A VEGETARIAN.

Eminent physicians and dietetic reformers of the present day are deeply interested in solving the great problem of wholesome food for human beings, and in introducing food reform in Western countries. Through their efforts thoughtful Americans are beginning to know something of the healthful effects of vegetarian diet, and to question whether they shall become vegetarians. This question has never been discussed in the West with so much earnestness as now. Among the ancient Greek philosophers we find strong advocates of vegetarianism in Pythagoras, Plato, Socrates, Seneca, Plutarch, Tertullian, Porphyry and others; but the vast majority of Western people regard vegetarians with contempt and ridicule. In India this problem was solved by the Hindu philosophers long before Pythagoras was born, and in their writings we find logical and scientific arguments against the killing of animals and the eating of animal flesh. Many historians and Oriental scholars are of opinion that Pythagoras owed his ideas regarding



a vegetable diet to the Hindu philosophers, who from prehistoric times had advocated and practised a strictly vegetarian diet.

India is the only country in the world where vegetarianism has prevailed for centuries among the vast majority of people. The Hindus were the first nation in the world who understood the fundamental principles of the vegetarian theory. It was from the Hindus that other nations, such as the Chinese, Japanese, Thibetans, Siamese, Burmese, Ceylonese and Persians became impressed with the idea that the slaughter of animals for food is cruel, inhuman and wicked. The greatest thinkers and sages of ancient India gave arguments in support of vegetarianism from different standpoints, such as physical health; the physiological structure of our organs; the chemical analysis of food; and the moral and spiritual ideals of life. Native doctors and physicians in India do not approve of animal food and agree generally with many Western doctors that animal flesh is one of the main causes of such diseases as dyspepsia, gout, consumption and nervous disorders. Hindu physicians argue that animals fattened for slaughter are more or less diseased on account of their unnatural mode of living and the unnatural food which they are forced to eat; that the germs of various diseases are introduced into the human system and that parasites come into the human body through the medium of animal flesh. They further assert that all flesh, being a product of nutrition, contains some refuse matter and impurity, because their elimination is suddenly arrested

by the slaughter of the animal. Some of these refuse materials are intensely poisonous, especially *creatin*. Animal flesh enriches the blood with unnecessary *fibrin*, and this produces unnatural heat in the system and in turn is the cause of unusual activity and restlessness, ultimately leading to the nervous debility which afflicts many meat eaters. Constant use of meat increases the action of the heart and brings premature loss of vital forces. Physiologists and comparative anatomists like Sir Everard Home have shown from the structure of the teeth, stomach, alimentary canal, the microscopic human blood-corpuscles and the digestive processes that man is by nature more related to frugivorous animals than to the carnivora.

From the chemical analysis of different vegetables, cereals, fruits, nuts, etc., and the flesh of different animals, and from the comparison of the constituent properties of vegetables with those of animal flesh it can be shown that everything necessary for the growth of the muscles, for the strength of the nerves and for the nourishment of the whole body can easily be obtained from the vegetable kingdom. As from animal food are obtained the proteids, fats and mineral matter, which are the principal factors in the nourishment and healthy growth of the body, so from the vegetable world these elements are supplied in rich abundance, and in addition to these the *carbohydrates* (starch and sugar), which cannot be found in animal food. This being the fact the question arises, why do we eat animal flesh? Is it for nourishment? No. The same nourishment can be obtained from vegetables, cereals

and pulses. Is it for health that we eat meat? No; because vegetarians as a class are healthier than the majority of meat eaters. Why then, is meat eaten? Because of the habit transmitted from generation to generation, and because of superstition, prejudice and ignorance.

In ancient times when agriculture was unknown, people lived upon fruits, nuts and other vegetable products which they found in abundance. But when the struggle for existence, which is so strongly manifested in the animal kingdom, became more difficult on account of the scarcity of fruits and nuts, they lived upon whatever they found around them. In that struggle the question of existence must precede the question of food. The savage tribes who do not know anything about agriculture and have not proper fruits and nuts, live chiefly upon wild animals, birds, reptiles and insects. Thus began the eating of flesh by man. Some people argue that flesh is the natural food of man, but this is not so. The meat-eating habit was formed through the force of necessity, and was handed down from father to son. Most people in civilized countries learn to live on animal flesh from their infancy, their parents teaching them by their example. They thus grow to think that they can hardly live without a diet of animal flesh. Some savage tribes became cannibals when they could not procure enough meat of wild animals. Shall the habits of cannibals signify that human flesh is the natural food of man? In Australia the aborigines live on loathsome worms and reptiles. In India there is a class of aboriginal

hill-tribes who eat poisonous snakes with great relish. Shall we say that these are the natural food for man? A man can eat anything with the help of cookery. But shall it be considered that man is naturally as omnivorous as a pig? The cows at Cape Cod eat the refuse of fish; horses can be taught to eat beef; bears can be trained to smoke tobacco; monkeys easily learn to drink tea, coffee and wine. Will such artificially acquired habits supply the arguments for man's eating flesh? Certainly not. The natural food of man is not animal flesh, but vegetables, fruits, nuts, cereals, etc., which grow spontaneously on this earth.

When Hindu boys and girls go to school and read their first lessons they learn the highest humanitarian principles, and as they grow older they are kind toward all living creatures. They are taught: "Be kind to lower animals. Do not kill them for your food, because the natural food of man is not an animal." I learned in the first book of Sanskrit: "When enough of nourishment can easily be obtained from that which grows spontaneously on the earth, who will commit such a great sin as to kill animals for filling his stomach and deriving a little pleasure of taste?" "Compare the eater with the animal that is eaten. The one has pleasure which lasts for a few seconds, and the other is deprived of all the pleasures of life." Seneca expressed a similar idea when he said: "Vegetables are sufficient food for the stomach into which we now stuff valuable lives."

It is extremely difficult for people in the West to realize why it is sinful to kill animals for food or for

pleasure. Their religion stands like a great stumbling-block in the way of their understanding. It teaches that the lower animals have no soul, no mind, no feelings; that they have been created for the food of human beings, and the duty of man is to eat what the merciful Lord has created for his sustenance and thank Him in return. This is the reason that so many animals are killed for Thanksgiving and Christmas days in Christian countries, as though the merciful Lord would not accept prayers unless some of His creatures are killed and eaten. A minister of a high church in London was present when I was talking about vegetarianism, and said to my friend: "Do not listen to these ideas; our Scriptures say they are the doctrine of devils," referring to the passage in the New Testament, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; . . . commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (I. Timothy, iv, 1, 3, 4, 5). How is it possible for people who believe in such sayings as the word of God to think that the killing of animals for food is sinful? As it is impossible for a Christian believer in this teaching to think that the slaughter of animals for food is sinful, so it is impossible for a Hindu to believe that the lower animals are created for this use by a merciful Lord. The

idea that animals were created for food for man is entirely Semitic in its origin. Such a doctrine is horrible to the Hindus, because their religion does not teach that this world was created out of nothing by an extra-cosmic personal God sitting on a throne somewhere in the heavens and commanding men to eat animals whom He created for this purpose.

The Hindu religion with all its various phases, such as the religion of the Vedas (which is erroneously called Brahminism), Buddhism and Jainism, is based upon the one fundamental principle,—the evolution of man from lower animals. It teaches that one life principle is manifesting in various forms of the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms; that all are linked together by a mighty chain of evolution; and that from the minutest protoplasm to the highest man, each stage of life differs from another not in kind, but in degree. The religion of the Hindus denies entirely that the lower animals are without mind, soul and feeling; and teaches that life and mind are manifested simultaneously. Wherever there is life there is the manifestation of the cosmic mind, the difference being in the degree of manifestation. The least expression is in the mineral, it is a little higher in the vegetable, and still higher in the animal kingdom. Even a unicellular amoeba has mind. It feels pain and tries to avoid that sensation. Advanced scientists of modern times do not deny this. Prof. Le Conte expresses this idea most forcibly in some of his lectures. As we rise in the animal kingdom we find the expression of the same life and mind in and through highly de-

veloped animal bodies; and ultimately, through the most individualized and complex organism of the human body. Each one of these animals possesses a soul, has individuality and the sense of "I," can feel pleasure and pain, has fear of death and struggles to live. The germ of life in each one of these will gradually pass through the various stages of evolution and ultimately appear in a human form. Therefore, the religion, philosophy and Scriptures of the Hindus teach that as life is dear to us, so is it dear to the lower animals; as we do not wish to be killed, so they too shrink from death. "Do not kill any animal for pleasure, see harmony in nature and lend a helping hand to all living creatures," say the Hindu Scriptures. The earliest writings of the Hindus, I mean the Vedas, teach: "*Mâ himsyât sarva bhûtâni*," that is, "Do not kill any living creature either for food or for pleasure."

The great epic of the Hindus, the Râmâyana, or the exploits of Râma, teaches that we should treat lower animals as our brothers, and describes their value in the economy of nature in the most poetic and dramatic way. It is said that Râma, the great Incarnation of God in flesh and blood on earth, fought with the king of demons in order to rescue Sita, his devoted wife, who was captured by the demoniac King of Ceylon. His huge army consisted of all kinds of animals. The ape, Hanumân, the greatest of organized life beneath man in the scale of evolution, was the commander-in-chief. The bear is described as the prime minister, and other animals as soldiers. The whole

story is written in such a masterly manner that whoever reads it can never be unkind or cruel to any animal, not to speak of killing it for food.

Western people have the mistaken impression that Buddha was the reformer who introduced vegetarianism amongst the Hindus. This is an error. Buddha merely popularized the doctrine of non-killing taught by the Vedas, which was practised at that time by only a limited class of Hindu sages; he also protested against animal sacrifices performed by the priests. The priests sacrificed animals not for the purpose of eating flesh, but for propitiating the Devas or bright spirits, through whose mercy they thought they would gain higher powers and conquer their enemies.

Some people say that in the economy of nature the struggle for existence demands that one animal shall live upon another, as birds of prey live upon other birds, as carnivora live upon other animals; and that we are therefore perfectly justified to live upon animal flesh. It is true that in nature we find the expression of such a law. It is a law that governs the lower animal nature. We may call it a brutal law. But there are other laws which govern our better nature. These are moral and spiritual laws which do not express themselves in lower animals but in human beings alone. If we do not recognize these higher laws we shall never rise above the animal plane. Man stands at the head of the animal kingdom not because he possesses in a highly developed form the same qualities that the lower animals have, but because he is capable of subduing the animal nature by the



moral and spiritual. A man lacking this moral and spiritual nature is in no way better than the lowest order of brutes. Human beings have the power of degrading themselves to the lowest animal plane as well as of raising themselves to the highest plane of spiritual enlightenment. They can manifest perfectly their divine nature. In short, they can live on earth as embodiments of all good. The same human being may carry destruction, havoc, disharmony, and inhuman cruelty wherever he goes, or he may bring help, good-will, peace, love and blessings. The same energy when guided by animal nature creates havoc and becomes diabolical; when directed by higher nature and love brings happiness to all.

Think of the moral degeneration of the slaughter-house butchers. The continuous contact with slaughter blunts their higher feelings and at last makes them brutal. They do not hesitate to drive the same knives with which they kill helpless beasts into the hearts of their fellow-men. Chicago has the largest slaughter-houses in the world. Many thousands of animals are killed there every month by trained butchers. Most of the murderers in Chicago come from the butcher class. Who is responsible for their moral degeneration and for the crimes committed by them? Do the meat eaters ever think of this phase of flesh eating? They neither like to hear such facts nor to think of them, because it shocks their sensitive feelings. They want to close their eyes and ears to such sights and sounds. But the truth is that meat eaters are responsible. They are indirectly the

causes of all the wicked deeds done by those butchers; they are the causes of their moral degeneration. If there be no meat eater, there would be no butcher. A refined woman would shudder at seeing a red-handed butcher, but she should remember that she must share the responsibility of brutalizing and degrading him. If she killed the animals by her own hands, for her own food, it would be better, for this would save another from becoming an inhuman slayer for her. In every country butchers are considered as heartless and feelingless. In India they are debarred from the society of gentlemen, and the Hindus think that there is no stronger curse than to call a man a butcher. In the United States in some commonwealths no man connected with this trade is allowed to sit in a jury for trying a murder case, because it is recognized that the mind, feelings and whole moral nature become blunted by association with the slaughter of animals. If the process of furnishing flesh from the slaughter-house to the kitchen were remembered when sitting at table with a savory piece of steak before them, I dare say two-thirds of the meat eaters who have any feeling at all would give up meat eating without delay. A young American of my acquaintance who visited the slaughter-houses in Chicago was so deeply impressed by the brutality, cruelty and inhuman atmosphere of the place that he never touched any meat from that day. No individual who eats animal flesh can avoid moral responsibility. He must necessarily take a share in the cause of the moral degeneration of his brethren.

Various objections have been raised by meat eaters against vegetarianism. Some say if animals are not used for food they will overrun the earth. The same argument applies to animals which are not eaten, such as horses, donkeys, dogs, cats and rats, as to sheep, cattle, pigs and poultry. In India the Hindus do not kill cows, but they are not overrun by them. The Hindus did not have any slaughter-houses until the British Government established them. In the states that are still governed by the Hindu Râjâs the wild animals and birds are protected by strict laws. But these states are not overrun by wild animals, nor are the inhabitants driven out by them.

An American who recently made a short visit to India, Dr. J. H. Barrows, formerly of Chicago, said in a lecture in New York that he saw in the streets of Benares some oxen lean and poor as compared with those which are fattened for the Chicago slaughter-houses. His heart melted with kindness and pity at the sight, and he said it is much more kind to kill cattle for food than to allow them to live half-fed or ill-fed. What a curious notion of kindness is this ! Dr. Barrows also said that if we do not eat fish the seas and oceans will soon become a solid mass of fish. Any efforts of man to keep down the number of fishes would be vain without the operation of nature's laws, which regulate production and preserve a proper ratio. But this sort of statement and argument is not uncommon from friends of the flesh-eating habit. Others hold that unless they eat animal flesh they will be weak and useless for work and will lack bravery and cour-

age. This is a great mistake. You have heard of the Hindu Sikh soldiers in India, who are the bravest and strongest fighters in the British army. They never turn their back to an enemy in the battle-field. One Sikh soldier can stand against three beef-eaters in hand-to-hand fight. But these soldiers never touch meat, or fish, never drink wine, or smoke tobacco. They are strict vegetarians. Millions of Scotchmen have become healthy, strong, hardy and intellectual while living on oatmeal. In a running race of seven athletes in Germany, amongst whom there was one vegetarian, it was shown that a vegetarian can win over meat eaters even in athletic sports. A vegetarian diet gives great endurance and makes one even-tempered. People generally mistake a ferocious, restless and rash temper for courage and strength. These say that a tiger or a wolf is stronger than a horse, a buffalo or an elephant. They make ferocious nature the standard of strength. It is true that a tiger can kill a horse, but has he the muscular strength which enables a horse to draw a heavy load a long distance? A tiger can kill an elephant, but can he lift a cannon weighing hundreds of pounds? Ferocity is one thing and muscular strength is another; we ought to distinguish the one from the other. The source of strength lies in the vegetable kingdom and not in flesh and blood. If flesh eating be the condition of physical strength, why do meat eaters prefer the flesh of herbivorous animals and not that of the carnivora? Some meat eaters say that animal flesh has a large quantity of vegetable energy concentrated in a small

compass. If that be their reason for the meat-eating habit, they ought to live on the flesh of carnivorous animals and birds, such as tigers, wolves, vultures and hawks.

As in the animal kingdom the carnivora are more restless than the herbivora, so amongst men we find that meat eaters are more restless and less self-controlled than vegetarians. As a peaceful, well-poised and self-controlled nature is the first sign of spiritual progress, it is plain that animal food is not the most helpful diet for spiritual development. It is for this reason that meat eaters find it so difficult to concentrate their minds on one particular object. It is impossible for them to meditate on their spiritual and divine nature. Therefore the Hindus, who understand the secret of spirituality, object to meat eating. Those Hindus who devote their whole life and mental energy to the attainment of spiritual perfection are called Yogis. According to them the non-killing of animals is one of the conditions of spiritual progress, and killing any animal, either for food or pleasure, is a great stumbling-block in the path of spirituality. Again, they classify the killing or injuring of animals in three divisions,—“committed,” “caused,” and “approved of.” For instance, I may kill an animal myself; this will be, according to the Yogis, “committed.” Secondly, I may cause another to kill; and thirdly, I may approve of the killing committed by another person, as by buying the flesh from a butcher. According to a Yogi, he who wishes to practise non-killing must not kill; must not cause another to kill; and must not approve

of the killing done by another. When this non-killing or non-injuring is perfectly established in a Yogi, he receives injury from none, not even from tigers nor from snakes. Tigers and snakes injure us because we have the feeling of injuring them. In fact the Yogis in India have carried the golden rule to its extreme and applied it to lower animals even, thus succeeding in making it a universal law. In the presence of Yogis ferocious animals become peaceful and render them great service. Such a state is idealized in the images and pictures of the greatest men and women Yogis in ancient India. The great Yogi Siva has most venomous snakes as ornaments on his neck, head and body. The great woman Yogi Durgâ stands on the back of ferocious tigers and lions. Truly speaking such Yogis have no enemies in the world.

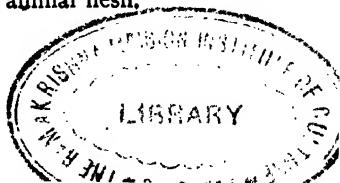
Another reason why a spiritually advanced Hindu does not like meat, is that eating flesh and drinking wine go hand in hand. It is a well-known fact that many people acquire the habit of drunkenness in trying to digest animal food with the help of liquors; and as drinking leads to all sorts of other vices, a Hindu believes that one can most easily be free from those vices by being a vegetarian. The Hindus are strongly opposed to drinking wines or liquors. If a high-caste Hindu gentleman should go to a saloon or should drink publicly, he would lose caste. Hindu women do not touch wine. In Hindu society no one can find a drunken woman, as one finds in the streets of cities in Western countries. The Hindus allowed no saloon in large cities; but now, under the demoralizing in-

fluence of the liquor trade of the British Government, one finds hundreds of saloons in some cities. Hindus cannot understand how a civilized nation can approve of liquor trade and opium trade; can seek to demoralize sober people by opening saloons in villages, and inducing the poor laboring classes to acquire habits of drunkenness by offering them strong liquors at no cost. Many people have asked me again and again whether the Hindus have become more moral under the British rule. They would not ask such questions if they knew the demoralizing effects of liquor trade and opium trade in India, and also if they remembered that wherever a Christian missionary goes, a bottle of brandy or whiskey soon follows him. The vegetarian Hindus do not touch wine, even in the form of a medicine.

Lastly, a Hindu is a vegetarian from the standpoint of love. Love means the expression of oneness. The Hindus love lower animals because of oneness. Their ideal is to realize that one spiritual Being is manifesting through all living creatures. The divine Spirit which is dwelling within us and illuminating our inner nature with the light of intelligence and consciousness is also dwelling in lower animals. Their ideal is not a vague, indefinite and meaningless word, such as "brotherhood." They wish to realize that we are one in Spirit with the lower animals, one with every living creature. Their religion teaches: "Love every living creature as thy Self," because the same Self or Spirit is in all. "Realize the Self or Spirit within you; then you shall be able to see the same Spirit everywhere.

He who realizes the one universal Spirit everywhere, cannot kill Spirit by Spirit." He becomes truly unselfish. He is ever ready to help all. Whenever we kill any animal for our food or pleasure we are selfish. It is on account of extreme selfishness that we do not recognize the rights of other animals and that we try to nourish, nay, even to amuse ourselves, by killing innocent creatures or by injuring them, or by depriving them of their rights. This kind of selfishness is the mother of all evil thoughts and wicked deeds. That which makes us selfish and helps us to cling to our lower self is degrading and wicked; that which leads us towards unselfishness is elevating and virtuous. That which prevents us from realizing the oneness of Spirit is wrong; that which opens our spiritual eyes and helps us to see that Divinity is expressing itself through the forms of lower animals, and makes us love them as we love our own Self, is godly and divine.

Every kind of food which we take into our bodies produces changes in our system, both physical and mental. Those who have carefully examined the changes that are produced in their minds by meat diet and who have struggled for self-control, will find it extremely difficult to govern animal passions, violent nature and restless condition of mind without giving up animal food. Thus, looking at the food question from various standpoints, a Hindu is a vegetarian and cannot advocate the eating of animal flesh.















# VEDÂNTA PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE BY

SWÂMI ABHEDÂNANDA

ON

## Woman's Place in Hindu Religion

DELIVERED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE VEDÂNTA SOCIETY,  
AT CARNEGIE LYCEUM, NEW YORK, SUNDAY,  
DECEMBER 16th, 1900

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FIFTH EDITION

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Copyright, 1901

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Published by the VEDÂNTA ASHRAMA  
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.



‘ Where women are honored, there the Devas (gods) are pleased; but where they are not honored no sacred rite yields rewards.’

“ Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers.”—*Laws of Manu* III, 66, 67.

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## WOMAN'S PLACE IN HINDU RELIGION.

Well has it been said by Louis Jaccoliot, the celebrated French author of the “Bible in India,” that: “India of the Vedas entertained a respect for women amounting to worship; a fact which we seem little to suspect in Europe when we accuse the extreme East of having denied the dignity of woman and of having only made of her an instrument of pleasure and of passive obedience.” He also said: “What! Here is a civilization which you cannot deny to be older than your own, which places the woman on a level with the man and gives her an equal place in the family and in society.” As on the one hand, the dawn of civilization first broke on the social horizon of India, so on the other, India is a country where the highest ideals of religion were understood, the noblest philosophy was taught, and an unparalleled code of ethical laws had been handed down, from a time when the barbarous customs of savage tribes prevailed among the nations that surrounded the mother-land of the moral,



spiritual and God-loving nation of the Aryans. Long before the civil laws of the Romans, which gave the foundation for the legislation of Europe and of America, were codified by Justinian, nay, many centuries before Moses appeared as the law-giver of the Semitic tribes, the Hindu laws of Manu were closely observed, and strictly followed by the members of Hindu society in general. Many of the Oriental scholars, having compared the digest of Justinian and the Mosaic laws of the Old Testament with the Hindu laws, have arrived at the conclusion that the code of Manu was related to them as a father is to his child. The Hindu law-givers repeated and codified only those ethical principles which were entertained by the Hindus of the Vedic period. Following the teachings of the Vedas, the Hindu legislator gives equal rights to men and women by saying, "Before the creation of this phenomenal universe, the first-born Lord of all creatures divided his own self into two halves, so that one half should be male and the other half female." This illustration has established in the minds of the Hindus the fundamental equality of man and woman. Just as the equal halves of a fruit possess the same nature, the same attributes and the same properties in equal proportion, so man and woman, being the equal halves of the same substance, possess equal rights, equal privileges and equal powers. This idea of the equality of man and woman was the corner-stone of that huge structure of religion and ethics among the Hindus which has stood for so many ages the ravages of time and change defying the onslaughts of the short-sighted critics of the

world. Therefore in India whatever is claimed for the man may also be claimed for the woman; there should be no partiality shown for either man or woman, according to the ethical, moral and religious standards of the Hindus. The same idea of equality was most forcibly expressed in the Rig Veda (Book 5th, hymn 61, verse 8). The commentator explains this passage thus: "The wife and husband, being the equal halves of one substance, are equal in every respect; therefore both should join and take equal parts in all work, religious and secular." No other Scriptures of the world have ever given to the woman such equality with the man as the Vedas of the Hindus. The Old Testament, the Koran, and the Zend-Avesta have made woman the scapegoat for all the crimes committed by man. The Old Testament, in describing the creation of woman and fall of man, has established the idea that woman was created for man's pleasure, consequently her duty was to obey him implicitly. It makes her an instrument in the hands of Satan for the temptation and fall of the holy man with whom she was enjoying the felicity of paradise. Adam's first thought on that occasion was to shift the burden of guilt on to the shoulders of the woman. St. Paul, in the New Testament, shows that, through Adam's fall, woman was the means of bringing sin, suffering and death into the world. Popular Christianity has been trying lately to take away this idea, but in spite of all the efforts of the preachers the same idea still lurks behind the eulogies that have been piled upon the conception of womanhood in Christian lands. How is it possible for one

who believes the accounts given in Genesis to be literally true, to reject the idea there set forth that woman was the cause of the temptation and fall of man, thereby bringing sin and suffering and death into the world? For one who accepts the biblical account there is no other alternative left.

In India, such ideas never arose in the minds of the Vedic seers, nor have kindred notions found expression in the writings of the law-givers of later days. The Hindu legislators realized that both sexes were equal, and said before the world that women had equal rights with men for freedom, for the acquirement of knowledge, education and spirituality. It is for this reason that we find in the Rig Veda the names of so many inspired women who attained to the realization of the highest spiritual truths. These inspired women are recognized by all classes as the Seers of Truth, as spiritual instructors, divine speakers and revealers equally with the inspired men of Vedic hymns. Those who believe that the Hindu religion debar women from studying the Vedas or from acquiring the religious ideas ought to correct these erroneous notions by opening their eyes to the facts which are indelibly written on the pages of the religious history of India. The one hundred and twenty-sixth hymn of the first book of the Rig Veda was revealed by a Hindu woman whose name was Romashâ; the one hundred and seventy-ninth hymn of the same book, by Lopâmudrâ, another inspired Hindu woman. I can quote at least a dozen names of such women revealers of the Vedic wisdom, such as Aditi who instructed

Indra, one of the Devas, in the higher knowledge of Brahman, the Universal Spirit, Visvavârâ, Shashvati, Gârgi, Maitreyi, Apâlâ, Ghoshâ, etc. All of these are the names of inspired women revealers of the spiritual wisdom. Every one of them lived the ideal life of spirituality, being untouched by the things of the world. They are called in Sanskrit Brahmvâdinis, the speakers and revealers of Brahman—the Infinite Source of spirituality. They were devout performers of the religious rites, singers of holy hymns, and often discussed with great philosophers the most subtle problems of life and death, the nature of the soul and of God, and their inter-relation, and sometimes, in the course of these discussions, they defeated the most advanced thinkers among their opponents.

Those who have read the Upanishads, the philosophical portions of the Vedas, know that Gârgi and Maitreyi, the two great women Seers of Truth, discoursed philosophical topics with Yâjñavalka, who was one of the best authorities in the Vedic lore. There are many instances of women acting as umpires on such occasions. When Sankarâchârya, the great commentator of the Vedânta, was discussing this philosophy with another philosopher, a Hindu lady, well versed in all the scriptures, was requested to act as umpire.

If, in the face of such facts, the Christian missionaries say that the Hindu religion prevents women from studying the Vedas or denies them a place in religion, we can only console ourselves by thinking that the eyes of our missionary brothers and sisters are not open to

truths which exist outside the boundary line of their own particular creed and religion. It is the especial injunction of the Vedas, however, that no married man shall perform any religious rite, ceremony, or sacrifice without being joined in it by his wife; should he do so, his work will be incomplete and half finished, and he will not get the full results; because the wife is considered to be a partaker and partner in the spiritual life of her husband; she is called in Sanskrit, *Sahadharmini*, "spiritual help-mate." This idea is very old, as old as the Hindu nation. It is true that there were certain prohibitions for some women against certain studies and ceremonies, which were prescribed for those only who were in a different stage of spiritual development, just as a certain class of men were proscribed from the studies of some portions of the Vedas or from performing certain ceremonies simply because they were not ready for them.

Coming down from the Vedic period to the time when the Purânas and Epics were written, we find that the same idea of equality between men and women was kept alive, and that the same laws were observed as during the time of the Vedas. Those who have read the Râmâyana, one of the great epics of India, will remember how exemplary was the character of *Sitâ*, the heroine. She was the ideal wife, the ideal mother and the ideal queen; she was the embodiment of purity, chastity and kindness, the personification of spirituality. She still stands as the perfect type of ideal womanhood in the hearts of Hindu women of all castes and creeds. In the whole religious history of the world

a second *Sîtâ* will not be found. Her life was unique. She is worshipped as an Incarnation of God, as Christ is worshipped among the Christians. India is the only country where prevails a belief that God incarnates in the form of a woman as well as in that of a man.

In the *Mahâbhârata* we read the account of *Sulabhâ*, the great woman *Yogi*, who came to the court of King Janaka and showed wonderful powers and wisdom, which she acquired through the practice of Yoga. This shows that women were allowed to practise Yoga; even to-day there are many living *Yoginîs* in India who are highly advanced in spirituality. Many of these *Yoginîs* become spiritual teachers of men. Sri Râmakrishna, the greatest Saint of the nineteenth century, was taught spiritual truths by a *Yoginî*.\*

As in religion the Hindu woman of ancient times enjoyed equal rights and privileges with men, so in secular matters she had equal share and equal power with men. From ancient times, women in India have had the same right to possess property as men; they could go to the courts of justice, plead their own cases and ask for the protection of the law.

Those who have read the famous Hindu drama called *Sakuntalâ*, which stands as high as the best dramas of Shakspeare in tone and quality, know that *Sakuntalâ* pleaded her own case and claimed her rights in the court of King Dushyanta. Similar in-

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\* See "Life and Sayings of Râmakrishna," by Prof. F. Max Müller, published by Scribner and Sons, New York.

stances are mentioned in the Rig Veda, the most ancient writing of the Hindus, in the one hundred and eighth hymn of the tenth book. As early as 2000 B.C. Hindu women were allowed to go to the battle-fields to fight against enemies. Saramâ, one of the most powerful women of her day, was sent by her husband in search of robbers. She discovered their hiding-place and afterwards destroyed them.

In the fifth book of the Rig Veda we read that King Namuchi sent his wife to fight against his enemies. She fought and eventually conquered them. There have been many instances of women holding high political powers, governing States, making laws and administering justice to all. Throughout the history of India are to be found the names of many women who have governed their own territories. Some women of later dates resisted foreign invaders. The history of India records the wonderful generalship of the *Râni* of Jhânsi, who held a portion of the British army in check during the famous mutiny of 1857-58. She headed her troops against the British, dressed like a cavalry officer, and after a hard fight she fell in battle and died in June, 1858. Sir Hugh Rose declared that the best man on the enemy's side was the *Râni* of Jhânsi, not knowing that the *Râni* was not a man, but the Queen herself.

Not long ago a Hindu lady, Aus Kour by name, was elevated by the Hindus, with the help of the British government, to the disputed throne of the disorganized and revolted State of Patiâlâ, in the northwest of India. She has been described by English historians

as the most competent person to govern that State. In less than a year she brought peace and security into all parts of her dominions.

Ahalyâ Bai, the Queen of Mâlhwâ, governed her kingdom with great success for twenty years, devoting herself to the rights and comforts of her people and the happiness of her subjects; she was so great and popular that both the Mahammedans and the Hindus united in prayers for her long life; so little did she care for name and fame that when a book was written in her honor she ordered it to be destroyed, and took no notice of the author.

America boasts of her civilization and the freedom of her women, but we know how little power and how few privileges have been given to women. The cause of this is deeply rooted in the biblical conception of womanhood. It is claimed that Christianity has elevated the condition of women; but, on the contrary, history tells us that it is Christianity that has stood for centuries in the way of the religious, social and political freedom of women. Think of the women's suffrage societies, and how hard they are struggling to win recognition of the rights of their sex.\* Roman

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\* The following extract from a letter sent by Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Bishop Potter of New York on 15th Jan. 1901 will give an idea of the situation :—

“ Ever and anon public thought is aroused by a terrible tragedy, like the one enacted in Paterson, or by some unusually open manifestation of vice in the streets of our cities. Though an aroused public sentiment can repress the evils for a time in one locality, they reappear at once with renewed



law and Roman jurisprudence gave woman a place far more elevated than that given to her by Christianity. The Christians learned to honor the women from the pagans. The Teutonic tribes believed, like the Hindus, in the perfect equality of both sexes in all domestic and

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energy in many others. Occasionally, church officials make their protests, but no one seems to understand the hidden cause of all these outrages.

"The authorities of the Episcopal Church are just now aroused to action. The first step to be taken is to teach woman a higher respect for herself, and the rising generation a more profound reverence.

"The Church and the Bible make woman the football for the jibes and jeers of the multitude.

"When, in their marriage service, it is the duty of woman to obey, and be given away by some man, she is made the inferior and subject of man.

"All our efforts to suppress the social evil are hopeless until woman is recognized in the canon law and all church discipline as equal in goodness to bishops, archbishops and the Pope himself.

"The sentiments of men in high places are responsible for the outrages on woman in the haunts of vice and on the highway. If the same respect the masses are educated to feel for cathedrals, altars, symbols and sacraments were extended to the mothers of the race, as it should be, all these problems would be speedily settled.

"When our good men in State and Church try to suppress the terrible outrages on woman, while they deal with the evil on the surface, they should begin the lasting work of securing to her equal honor, dignity and respect by sharing with her all the liberties they themselves enjoy.

"The lesson of inferiority is taught everywhere, and in these terrible tragedies of life we have the result of the universal degradation of woman."

social relations, and held that a queen was as good as a king. Even to-day the Christian nations fail to see this equality between man and woman.

The Hindu law allows the women a much greater share in the management of property than most of the statutes of the Christian nations.

In family affairs, religious or secular, especially in business or trade, a husband in India cannot take any step without consulting the female members of the family.

It is often said that Hindu women are treated like slaves by their husbands; but it is not a fact. On the contrary, the Hindu women get better treatment than the majority of the wives of Englishmen or of Americans endowed with the spirit of an English husband. Sir M. M. Williams says: "Indian wives often possess greater influence than the wives of Europeans." The number of wife-beaters is considerably smaller in India than in Europe or America. He is not a true Hindu who does not regard a woman's body as sacred as the temple of God. He is an outcast who touches a woman's body with irreverence, hatred or anger. "A woman's body," says Manu the law-giver, "must not be struck hard even with a flower, because it is sacred." It is for this reason that Hindus do not allow capital punishment for women. The treatment of woman, according to Hindu religion, will be better understood from some of the quotations which I will append from the laws of Manu and other law-givers. Manu says:

1. "The mouth of a woman is always pure." V, 130.

2. "Women must be honored and adorned by their fathers, husbands, brothers, and brothers-in-law, who desire their own welfare." III, 55.

3. "Where women are honored, there the Devas (gods) are pleased; but where they are dishonored, no sacred rite yields rewards." III, 56.

4. "Where female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers." III, 57.

5. "In like manner, care must be taken of barren women, of those who have no sons, of those whose family is extinct, of wives and widows faithful to their lords, and of women afflicted with diseases." VIII, 28.

6. "A righteous king must punish like thieves those relatives who appropriate the property of such females during their lifetime." VIII, 29.

7. "In order to protect women and Brahmins, he who kills in the cause of right, commits no sin." VIII, 349.

8. "One's daughter is the highest object of tenderness; hence, if one is offended by her, one must bear it without resentment." IV, 185. Compare this with the statements of the missionaries that the Hindu religion sanctions the killing of girls.

9. "A maternal aunt, the wife of a maternal uncle, a mother-in-law, and a paternal aunt, must be honored like the wife of one's spiritual teacher; they are equal to the wife of one's spiritual teacher." II, 131.

(In India, the wife of a spiritual teacher is regarded as a living goddess.)

10. "Towards the sister of one's father and of one's

mother and towards one's elder sister, one must behave as towards one's mother; but the mother is more venerable than they." II, 133.

11. "But the teacher is ten times more venerable than the sub-teacher, the father a hundred times more than the teacher, but the mother a thousand times more than the father." II, 145.

12. "A chaste wife, who after the death of her husband constantly remains chaste, reaches heaven, though she have no son, just like those chaste men." V, 160. Compare this with the statements of the missionaries that the Hindu widows are cursed by their religion.

13. "In that family where the husband is pleased with his wife and the wife with her husband, happiness will assuredly be lasting." III, 60.

14. "Offspring, the due performance of religious rites, faithful service, highest conjugal happiness, and heavenly bliss for the ancestors and one's self, depend upon the wife alone." IX, 28.

15. "Let mutual fidelity continue till death; this may be considered as a summary of the highest law for husband and wife." IX, 101.

From other Hindu laws:

"Woman possesses an unequalled means of purification; they never become (entirely) foul."

"Women are pure in all limbs."

1. "Man is strength, woman is beauty; he is the reason that governs and she is the wisdom that moderates."

2. "He who despises woman despises his mother."

3. "He who is cursed by a woman is cursed by God."

4. "The tears of a woman call down the fire of heaven on those who make them flow."

5. "Evil to him who laughs at a woman's sufferings; God shall laugh at his prayers."

6. "The songs of women are sweet in the ears of the Lord; men should not, if they wish to be heard, sing the praises of God without women."

7. "There is no crime more odious than to persecute women, and to take advantage of their weakness to despoil them of their patrimony."

8. "The woman watches over the house, and the protecting divinities (Devas) of the domestic hearth are happy in her presence. The labors of the field should never be assigned to her."

9. "When relatives, by some subterfuge, take possession of the property of a woman, her carriages or her jewels, such evil doers shall descend into the infernal regions."

10. "The virtuous woman should have but one husband, as the right-minded man should have but one wife."

Here is the definition of a wife given in the Mahābhārata:—

"A wife is half the man, his truest friend;  
A loving wife is a perpetual spring  
Of virtue, pleasure, wealth; a faithful wife  
Is his best aid in seeking heavenly bliss;  
A sweetly speaking wife is a companion

In solitude, a father in advice,  
A mother in all seasons of distress,  
A rest in passing through life's wilderness."

The Christian missionaries say that these laws are most horrible! To-day in some parts of Europe women are yoked together with horses and cattle in the field, and obliged to do the roughest labor.

The unmarried daughter, not the son, inherits the mother's estate. This is the Hindu law. The special property of the wife which she gets as dowry cannot be used by the husband. A wife in India is not responsible for the debts of her husband, or son. The mother in India owns her children as much as the father does.

Mrs. F. A. Steele, who has written several novels on Indian life, and who resided in India for twenty-five years, writes of Indian women: "In regard to the general position of women in India, I think it is rather better than our own. Women in India can hold property, and a widow always gets a fixed portion of her husband's estate."

Some American ladies who lived in India, not as missionaries but as impartial observers, have corroborated these statements. It is generally said that the Hindu law makes no provision for the Hindu widows. Let us see what an English historian says:

"In the absence of direct male heirs, widows succeed to a life-interest in real, and absolute interest in personal property. The daughters inherit absolutely. Where there are sons, mothers and daughters are en-

titled to shares, and wives hold peculiar property from a variety of sources over which a husband has no control during their lives, and which descend to their own heirs, with a preference to females."—Mill's History of India, vol. I, p. 248.

Much has been said against the marriage customs of the Hindus. I have heard a great deal of objection to them, in this country especially. It is true that marriage by courtship is not considered by the Hindus to be the highest and best system; they say this method generally proceeds from selfish desires, for the mere gratification of passion. Marriage according to the Hindu ideas must be based on the ideal of the spiritual union of the souls, and not on the lower desires for sense pleasures. It must be a sacred bond. The Hindus were the first to recognize marriage as an indissoluble holy bond between two souls. Even death does not dissolve it; and this idea prevails in the hearts of many Hindu wives, who do not care to remarry after the death of their husbands, but prefer to devote their lives to fulfilling spiritual duties.

Mrs. Steele says: "I have seen many a virgin widow who gloried 'n her fate." Marriage is not considered to be the only aim of life. There are nobler and higher purposes, and they must be accomplished before death comes. The whole spirit of the marriage laws in India is in favor of the legal union between one man and one woman; but they allow a little latitude for the preservation of the race. It is said that a man may marry a second wife for progeny alone, with the consent of his first wife, in case she should be barren.

The aim of Hindu lawgivers was to build a society where the moral and spiritual evolution of the individual should be free from legal interference. Therefore they divided society into classes, and set forth laws for each class; the marriage laws in India have been many-sided in order to suit the different tendencies which prevailed among different classes. Hindu lawgivers understood that one law would not do for all people. The higher the class in society, the more restricted are their laws; for instance, the same lawgiver who allows the marriage of widows amongst the lower classes, sets forth arguments against its practice among women of a higher class. Nearly all Hindu widows of the lower classes can remarry after the death of their husbands; but it depends upon the choice both of the husband and the wife. The Hindu law provides for the remarriage of widows and of divorced women in the same way as for the remarriage of widowers and divorced men. According to the law, a wife may abandon her husband (if she choose) if he be criminal, insane, impotent, outcast or afflicted with leprosy; also because of his long absence in foreign lands, and can take another husband. The Roman law gives no other causes of divorce than these. Similarly, a husband may abandon his wife if she be drunken or adulterous, afflicted with leprosy, or cruel towards husband and children, and can remarry. But the Hindu law does not allow a divorce simply for incompatibility of temper, nor because of the simple desire in either party to marry another.

It is said that the greatest curse is the child-mar-



riage in India, and that it is sanctioned by religion; but this is not true. Religion distinctly forbids it, and in many parts of India so-called child-marriage is nothing but a betrothal. The betrothal ceremony takes place some years before the real marriage ceremony; sufficient cause may prolong the period of betrothal for even three or four years. In Northern India the real marriage does not take place until the parties are of proper age; it is attended with music, feasting, and the presentation of gifts. A betrothed wife stays in her father's house until the time of her real marriage. In Southern India, customs are not the same; many abuses have crept in, and child-wives are often given to their husbands at too tender an age. The Hindu law does not prevent the remarriage of the betrothed wife after the death of her betrothed husband; but it says that under such circumstances the parents of the betrothed wife commit a sin as of giving false witness before the court of justice.

According to the Hindu law it is better for a girl of a high caste to remain unmarried for life than to marry one who is not of noble birth or from a family of the same caste, or one who is unqualified and illiterate.

Eight different kinds of marriages are described and discussed by Hindu legislators, among which marriage with the consent of the parents of both parties, and not a sentimental love contract, is considered to be the highest. In ancient times, when the country was governed by Hindu kings, the *Svayambara* system of marriage was very common. It was the system of free choice of a husband by the maiden. Those who have

read "The Light of Asia," by Sir Edwin Arnold, will remember how Buddha was married. But when the Hindus lost their political freedom they would have been unable to prevent the intermixture of races had such liberty been continued; so they abandoned that system of marriage and adopted that of betrothing their sons and daughters in their youth. The betrothal, however, is not practised in all parts of the country.

Christian missionaries have brought false charges against the moral character of Hindu women, and some of our own country-women, having enlisted their names as Christian converts, have, I regret to say, joined these missionary detractors in bringing false charges against Hindu women. If you wish to know the true condition of the women in India, you will have to reject ninety-nine per cent. of the statements which you hear from the missionaries, or from Christian converts who come from India. There are immoral women in India, as there are in every other country, but it is more than wicked to make such sweeping statements as that there is no morality among Hindu women. The Panditâ Ramâbai said: "I would not trust one of my girls in any Indian home. The immorality in that country is horrible!"—*Fitchburg Sentinel*, 18 April, 1898.

Self-burning of widows was not sanctioned by the Hindu religion, but was due to other causes, the fact being that when the Mahammedans conquered India they treated the widows of the soldiers so brutally that the women preferred death, and voluntarily sought it. It is often said that the "Christian

government " has suppressed *Suttee*; but the truth is that the initiative in this direction was taken by that noble Hindu, Râm Mohan Roy, who was, however, obliged to secure the aid of the British government in enforcing his ideas, because India was a subject nation. The educated classes among the Hindus had strongly protested against the priests who supported this custom (which prevailed only in certain parts of India), and efforts had been made to suppress the evil by force; but as it could not be done without official help, appeal was made to the Viceroy, Lord Bentinck, and a law against *Suttee* was passed. Thus the evil was practically suppressed by the Hindus themselves, aided by the British government.

Sir. M. M. Williams says: " It was principally his (Râjâ Râm Mohan Roy's) vehement denunciation of this practice, and the agitation against it set on foot by him, which ultimately led to the abolition of *Satî* throughout British India in 1829."—" Brahmanism and Hinduism," p. 482.

The exclusion of women from the society of men, which we find in some parts of India, is not due to their religion but to other causes. It came into practice merely for self-defence against Mahammedan brutality. The *Purda* system, that is, the custom of not allowing women to appear in public without a veil, was not of Hindu origin, but was introduced into India by the Mahammedans. There are many parts of India where the *Purda* system does not exist at all, where men mix freely with women, travel in the same vehicle, and appear in public with the women unveiled. Sir

Monier M. Williams writes: "Moreover, it must be noted that the seclusion and ignorance of women, which were once mainly due to the fear of the Mahamedan conquerors, do not exist in the same degree in provinces unaffected by those conquerors."

Every one has heard the old missionary tale of the Hindu mothers throwing their babies to the crocodiles in the Ganges. Touching pictures of a black mother with a white baby in her arms calmly awaiting the advent of a large crocodile have adorned many Sunday-school books. Perhaps this story arose from the fact that in certain places poor Hindu mothers place the dead bodies of their little ones by the river-side because they cannot afford the expense of cremating them.

The zeal of the pious missionaries for Christianizing India was the cause of the story of the car of Jaggannath. Sir M. M. Williams says: "It is usual for missionaries to speak with horror of the self-immolation alleged to take place under the car of Jaggannath. But if deaths occur they must be accidental, as self-destruction is wholly opposed both to the letter and spirit of their religion."—"Brahmanism and Hinduism," p. 118.

As regards female infanticide, Panditâ Ramâbai herself wrote:

"Female infanticide, *though not sanctioned by religion and never looked upon as right* by conscientious people, has nevertheless in those parts of India mentioned been silently passed over unpunished by society in general."—"High-caste Hindu Women," p. 26.

The Panditâ does not perhaps know that numbers of dead bodies of illegitimate babies are picked up every year in the streets and vacant lots of New York and other large American cities. What does American society do about such criminals? Is it not equally reasonable to charge these evils to the Christian religion as to lay all the sins of India at the door of the Hindu religion?

High-caste Hindu women generally learn to read and write in their own vernacular, but they do not pass public examinations. Hindu religion does not prevent any woman from receiving education; on the contrary, it says that it is the duty of the parents, brothers, and husbands to educate their daughters, sisters, and wives. So if there be ignorance among Hindu women it is not the fault of their religion, but rather of their poverty.

Malabar boasts of seven great poets, and four of them were women. The moral sentiments uttered by one of them (Avyar) are taught in the schools as the golden rules of life. The writings of Lilâvati, a great woman mathematician, still form the text-book in native schools of the Hindus.

It is often said by the Christian missionaries that Hindu religion teaches that women have no souls, and that they are not entitled to salvation. On the contrary, all the sacred books of the Hindus testify against such outrageous falsities. Those who have read the Bhagavad Gitâ or the Upanishads know that according to Hindu religion the soul is sexless, and that all men and women will sooner or later reach the highest

goal of religion. It was in India that women were first allowed to be spiritual teachers and to enter into the monastic life. Those who have read the life of Buddha know that his wife became the leader of the Buddhist nuns. There are to-day hundreds of Hindu *sannyâsinis* (nuns) who are recognized as spiritual teachers by the Hindus. The wife of Sri Râmakrishna, the great Hindu Saint of the nineteenth century, has become a living example of the great honor and reverence that are paid by Hindus to a woman of pure, spotless spiritual life.

Lastly, the position of women in Hindu religion can be understood better by that unique idea of the Motherhood of God which is nowhere so strongly expressed and recognized as in India. The mother is so highly honored in India that the Hindus are not satisfied until they see divinity in the form of earthly mother. They say that one mother is greater than a thousand fathers, therefore the Hindus prefer to call the Supreme Being the Mother of the Universe. According to Hindu religion each woman, whether old or young, is the living representative of the Divine Mother on earth. The Divine Mother is greater than the "Creator" of other religions. She is the *Producer* of the Creator, or the First-born Lord of all creatures. There is no other country in the world where every living mother is venerated as an incarnation of the Divine Mother, where every village has a guardian mother who protects all as her own children.

Listen to the prayer that rises every day to the Al-

mighty Mother of the universe from the hearts of Hindu worshippers:

“O, Mother Divine, Thou art beyond the reach of our praises; Thou pervadest every particle of the universe; all knowledge proceeds from Thee, O, Infinite Source of wisdom! Thou dwellest in every feminine form, and all women are Thy living representatives upon earth.”







# VEDÂNTA PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE BY

SWÂMI ABHEDÂNANDA

ON

# THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

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THIRD EDITION

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Published by the VEDÂNTA ASHRAMA  
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.



"I am the Father and Mother of the universe."—*Bhagavad Gita*, ix, 17.

"Why does the God-lover find such pleasure in addressing the Deity as Mother? Because the child is more free with its Mother, and consequently she is dearer to the child than any one else."—*Life and Sayings of Ramakrishna*, by F. Max Müller, p., 118.

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## THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD.\*

The worship of God as the Mother of the universe, as our Divine Mother, is unknown to the people of the West.† Since the introduction of Christianity into Europe, the conception of God as the Creator and Father of the universe has been preached by the theologians and priests of Christendom. Jesus, the founder of Christianity, worshipped God as His Father, and prayed to Him as the Father of the universe; consequently, those who follow Jesus and His teachings worship God through this relation, established by their Master. The relation between father and son is much higher than that of the creator and his creatures, or the master and his servant. The more we advance in spirituality and the nearer we approach God, the closer becomes our relation to Him. The worship of God is impossible without having some kind of relation between the worshipper and the object of worship.

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\* Lecture delivered in Tuxedo Hall, New York, November 12, 1899, under title of "God, our Eternal Mother."

† In America Theodore Parker was the first who spoke of God as our Mother.

In the Hebrew religion God (Jehovah) was conceived of as the creator, ruler and governor of the universe. He was like a most powerful and despotic monarch. All creatures were related to Jehovah as subjects to their ruler. As a ruler punishes his disobedient subjects, so Jehovah punished those who disobeyed Him or His laws. The duty of a subject was almost the same as that of a slave to his master. As a slave serves his master through fear of punishment, so the Hebrews served Jehovah. The transition from such a relation to that of father and son was indeed a great step. It was no longer an external relation to power and strength, but became a kind of kinship, of internal or blood relation, such as exists between an earthly father and his son. There is a tie of love which binds a son to his father, and such a tie brings the individual soul much nearer to the Creator of the universe. As the earthly father of an individual is ordinarily considered to be his creator, because of his begetting him and bringing him into existence out of nothing, so, when the undeveloped human mind began to think of the creation of the universe, it imagined that the Creator was one who begot the universe and produced it out of nothing. Consequently the Creator became the Father of the universe.

All our conceptions of God begin with anthropomorphism, that is, with giving God human attributes in a greatly magnified degree, and end in de-anthropomorphism, that is, with making Him free from all human attributes. At the first stage of our conception

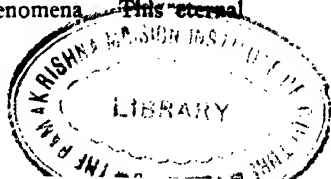
of God He appears to us as an extra-cosmic Being, as the Creator of the universe, who is separate from the universe and dwells outside of it, just as a carpenter is separate from the chair or table which he makes, or as the father is separate from the son whom he creates. The Hebrew conception of Jehovah was purely anthropomorphic. He was an extra-cosmic Being. He dwelt in a heaven outside of the universe and possessed all human attributes. He created the universe out of nothing, fashioned it and became its ruler. The same Jehovah, when considered as the Father of the universe by Jesus and His followers, did not lose His extra-cosmic nature. Even to-day the majority of Christians do not go beyond this idea of an extra-cosmic God. They worship the same extra-cosmic Jehovah as the Creator of the universe, as their father. Jehovah is always masculine. He is never described as feminine.

According to the Hebrews the masculine element of nature possessed all activity, strength and power; the male principle was recognized as the generator, and the female principle of nature was thought to be lower, insignificant, powerless and passive. The female principle of nature was the producer and bearer of what the male principle created; consequently everything that represented the female principle was considered as unimportant. This explains why womanhood was estimated so low by the writers of the Old and New Testaments, especially by the great apostle to the Gentiles. Even the very appearance and existence of woman on earth depended upon

a man's rib, according to Genesis. Although the Creator was represented by the Hebrews as masculine and all-powerful, when they explained the genesis of the world they could not deny the presence of the feminine element which helped the Creator in bringing life into existence. In the Mosaic account of Genesis we read "And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. I. 2), which literally means that the Creator impregnated the waters or the female element of nature. And as God, that is, the male element, was extra-cosmic, outside of nature, and possessed all activity and power, He became the object of worship; and the female element or nature was entirely ignored. Every Christian admits the existence of nature, the female principle; but she has never been worshipped or adored. The idea of Father grew stronger and stronger and the mother nature was left aside as passive and powerless, and was ultimately ignored. As long as the conception of God remains as extra-cosmic, separate from nature, which is passive, so long will He appear as Father alone. The more we comprehend God as immanent and resident in nature, the more clearly we understand that God is our Mother as well as our Father. When we see that nature or the feminine principle is inseparable from the Being or the masculine element, when we realize that nature is not passive and powerless but the Divine Energy, then we understand that God is one stupendous Whole, in whom exist both the masculine and feminine principles. Then we no

longer separate nature from God, but we recognize nature as a part of the manifested Divine Energy.

The tendency of modern science is towards this end. The doctrine of evolution, correlation of forces, persistence of energy, all these clearly prove that the phenomena of the whole universe and the various forces of the external and internal world are but the expressions of one eternal energy. The theory of evolution explains only the mode in which that eternal energy produces this phenomenal universe. Science has disproved the old theory of creation out of nothing through the fiat of an extra-cosmic God, and has shown that something can never come out of nothing. Science teaches that the universe existed in a potential state in that energy, and gradually through the process of evolution the whole potentiality has become kinetic or actual. That eternal energy is not an unintelligent energy, but is intelligent. Wherever we cast our eyes either in the external or internal world, we find the expression, not of a fortuitous or accidental combination of matter and mechanical forces, but of regular laws guided by definite purpose. This universe is not a chaos but a cosmos, one harmonious whole. It is not an aimless chain of changes which we call evolution, but there is an orderly hidden purpose at every step of evolution. Therefore, that energy is intelligent. We may call this self-existing, intelligent, eternal cosmic energy the Mother of the universe. She is the source of infinite forces and infinite phenomena. ~~This eternal~~





energy is called in Sanskrit, *Prakriti*, Latin *procreatrix*, the creative power of the universe.

*"Tvam parā Prakritih sakshat Brahmanah  
paramātmanah,  
Tvatto jdtam jagat sarvam tvam jagat janant Shive."*

"Thou art the *Parā Prakriti* or the divine energy of the Supreme Being. Of Thee is born everything of the universe, therefore Thou art the Mother of the universe." As all the forces of nature are but the manifestations of this Divine Energy, She is called all-powerful. Wherever there is the expression of any force or power in the universe, there is the manifestation of the eternal *Prakriti* or the Divine Mother. It is more appropriate to call that Energy mother than father, because, like a mother, that Energy holds within her the germ of the phenomenal universe before evolution, develops and sustains it, projects it on space and preserves it when it is born. She is the Mother of the Trinity, Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. She is the source of all activity. She is the *Sakti*, force in action. A creator, when deprived of his creative power, is no longer the creator. As the creative power is one of the expressions of that eternal Energy, so the Creator or *Brahmā* is looked upon by the Hindus as the child of the universal Divine Mother; so, is the Preserver and the Destroyer. The Hindus have understood this Eternal Energy as the Mother of the universe and have worshipped Her from prehistoric times, the Vedic period. Here you must remember that this Divine Energy is not the same as the powerless and passive nature which was rejected

and ignored by the Hebrews and the Christians. You must not mistake this worship of the Divine Mother for Nature-worship. In the Rig Veda, the most ancient of the Hindu Scriptures, we read: "The Mother Divine says 'I am the Queen of the universe, the giver of all wealth and fruits of works. I am intelligent and omniscient. Although I am one, by My powers I appear as manifold. I cause war for protecting men, I kill the enemy and bring peace on earth. I stretch out heaven and earth. I have produced the Father. As the wind blows by itself, so I produce all phenomena by My own will. I am independent and responsible to none. I am beyond the sky, beyond this earth. My glory is the phenomenal universe; such am I by My power.'"<sup>\*</sup> Thus the Divine Mother is described as all in all. We live and move and have our existence in that Divine Mother. Who can live for a moment if that Eternal Energy ceases to manifest? All our mental and physical activity depends on Her. She is doing whatever She chooses to do. She is independent. She obeys none. She is the producer of every event that occurs in the universe. She makes one appear good, spiritual and divine, while it is She who makes another appear as wicked and sinful. It is through Her power we perform virtuous deeds or commit sinful acts. But She is beyond good and evil, beyond virtue and vice. Her forces are neither good nor evil, but they appear so to us when we look at them from dif-

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<sup>\*</sup> Ig Veda, x, hymn, 125.

ferent standpoints and compare them with one another.

When that all-pervading Divine Energy manifests, it expresses itself in two sets of opposite forces. The one set has the tendency towards God and is called *Vidya* in Sanskrit. The other tends towards worldliness and is called *Avidya*. The one leads to freedom and happiness, and the other to bondage and suffering. The one is knowledge, the other is ignorance. The one is light, the other is darkness. Each individual soul is the center where these opposite forces are constantly working and fighting with one another. When *Vidya*, or the powers which lead Godward, predominate, we advance towards God and become religious, spiritual and unselfish; but when its opposite, the *Avidya* power, prevails, we become worldly, selfish and wicked. When the former is predominant the latter is overcome, and *vice versa*. These powers exist in each individual, though they vary in the degree of their strength in each. The man or woman in whom the former, that is, the Godward-leading powers, prevail, is called devotional, prayerful, righteous, pure in heart, unselfish. These qualities are but expressions of *Vidya* powers within us. Such higher powers are latent in all, even in those who do not show such qualities. All persons can rouse those latent powers by practicing devotion, prayer, righteousness, purity, unselfishness. The easiest way to attain these powers is by the worship of the *Vidya Sakti*, or that aspect of the Divine Mother or Divine Energy which represents all the powers that lead to

spiritual perfection. By worship or devotion we mean constant remembrance of that aspect. If we constantly think of the Source of all spirituality and of all the higher powers which make one spiritual, surely those powers will be aroused in us, and we shall become spiritual, righteous and unselfish. Therefore the Hindus worship this *Vidya Sakti*. When they worship that aspect, they do not deny or ignore the opposite aspect which leads to worldliness, but they make it subordinate to the higher *Vidya* aspect. Sometimes they think of these opposite forces separately, personify them and make them the female attendants of the Divine Mother. The Divine Mother has many attendants. All the evil forces of nature are Her attendants. She stands in the center of the universe radiant in Her own glory, like the sun when surrounded on all sides by thick dark clouds.

Wherever there is any expression of extraordinary righteousness and spirituality, there is special manifestation of the Divine Mother. There is Her incarnation. The Divine Mother incarnates sometimes in the form of a man, and sometimes in the form of a woman, to establish order and righteousness. All men and women are Her children. But there is something more in woman. As woman represents motherhood on earth, so all women, whether married or unmarried, are representatives of that Almighty Divine Mother of the universe. It is for this reason women are so highly revered and honored by the Hindus. There is no country in the world except India where God the Supreme Being is worshipped from

time immemorial as the Divine Mother of the universe. India is the only country where the earthly mother is looked upon as the living Deity, and where a man learns in his childhood "One mother is greater than a thousand fathers." You have heard many stories regarding the condition of women in India. Most of these are grossly exaggerated, some are utterly false and some are partially true. The familiar American story of Hindu mothers throwing their babes into the Ganges to become food for crocodiles, is unknown among the Hindus. In the first place, crocodiles cannot live in a strong current like that of the Ganges. I have traveled the length of this mighty river from its mouth to its source, some fifteen hundred miles, but never saw any such acts. These statements were heard by me for the first time after coming to America, though tales and pictures to this effect have been quite common in this country in books for the young. There is not time to go into a discussion of those points to-day, but so far I can assure you, that you will not find any other country "Where every living mother"—as Sir Monier Monier Williams says—"is venerated as a kind of deity by her children, where every village or city has its special guardian mother, called (in Sanskrit) *Mata*."\* It is extremely difficult for a Western mind to grasp exactly what the Hindus mean when they say that every woman is a representative of the Divine Mother. A very simple illustration will give you an idea of the respect the Hindus have for women. In Sanskrit

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\* "Hindulism and Brahmanism," p. 222.

when two names are used together the rule of grammar is that the more honorable should stand first. In Sanskrit we say women and men, not men and women; instead of father and mother, we say mother and father; instead of husband and wife, wife and husband, because a woman is always more honorable than a man. In India wives do not adopt their husbands' names, they do not merge their individuality into that of their husbands, as women do in the West, but they keep their own names separate. If a wife's name be Râdhâ, and her husband's name be Krishna, and if we say them together, we would say Râdhâ-Krishna and never Krishna-Râdhâ. The wife's name must be said first. So we say Sitâ-Râma; Sitâ is the wife and Râma is the husband. Again, when God incarnates in a man form, as in Krishna or Râma, the wife of such an incarnation will be worshipped as the incarnation of the Mother. The wife will be worshipped first and then the husband. A Western mind does not easily appreciate the wonderful reverence for womanhood which the Hindus have.

The Divine Mother is the personal God, the same as Iswara in Sanskrit; and Brahman or the Absolute Substance or the Universal Spirit is the impersonal Being. Brahman is formless, nameless and without any attributes. It is the ocean of absolute intelligence, existence and bliss. It has no activity. It is the Godhead of Fichte, the Substantia of Spinoza. It transcends all phenomena. Before phenomenal manifestation Divine Energy rested on the bosom of that ocean of Absolute Being in a potential state. It is

the dormant state of activity somewhat like our deep sleep state when all activity is latent. As in deep sleep all the mental and physical powers exist in us in an unmanifested condition and nothing is lost, so, before the beginning of the cosmic evolution all the phenomenal forces of the universe remained dormant in that Energy. There were no phenomena, no manifestation of any powers whatever. Again, as in our waking state all the latent powers manifest and we are able to walk, move, talk and are tremendously active, so, when a portion of that Impersonal Being wakes up, as it were, and manifests the latent cosmic powers out of the sleeping Energy, the evolution of the cosmic Energy begins and the Impersonal Being appears as the Creator of the universe and its Preserver.

Then the Impersonal Being is called personal, on account of that manifested energy. According to the Hindus that impersonal Brahman is neither masculine nor feminine. But the personal God is masculine and feminine both in one. Energy and Being are inseparable in the personal God. As pure Being without energy cannot produce any phenomena and as Energy possesses all activity and is the mother of all forces and phenomena, the personal God is most appropriately called the Mother of the universe. As fire and its burning power or heat are inseparable, so Being and Energy are inseparable and one. Those who worship the masculine aspect of God, in reality worship the male child born of that Divine Mother. Because the activity, strength and power which make one masculine owe their origin to that Divine En-

ergy. But those who worship the Divine Mother worship the Whole—all gods, all angels and all spirits that exist in the universe.

The wonderful effect of this conception of the Motherhood of God is to be found in the daily life of almost every Hindu woman as well as man. A Hindu woman thinks that she is a part of the Divine Mother, nay one with Her. She looks at all men and women of the world as her own children. She thinks herself as the blessed Mother of the world. How can such a woman be unkind to anybody? Her pure motherly love flows towards all men and women equally. There is no room for any impure thought or feeling or passion in such a heart. That perfect motherly feeling makes her ultimately live like the Divine Mother on earth. Her ideal God in human form is her own child. She worships the incarnation of God as her most beloved child. Just as Mary was the mother of Jesus, so the Hindu women in India often look upon themselves as the mother of Krishna, the Hindu Christ, or of Râma, another incarnation. Christian mothers, perhaps, will be able to appreciate this to a certain extent. If a Christian mother thinks that she is Christ's mother and loves Him as she loves her own child, the effect will be wonderful. She will then understand what Divine Motherhood is. The Hindus think this is the easiest way for women to attain to that love which makes one unselfish and divine. A mother can sacrifice everything for her child; she naturally loves the child without seeking any return, though there are mothers who do not



possess pure, unselfish motherly love. A true mother, however, loves her child above everything. If such a child be an incarnation of God Himself, how easy it will be for the mother to attain to the highest goal of religion. I know a lady in India who became a widow when she was young. She did not marry again. She was not like the ordinary woman of the world who thinks that a husband is essential for her happiness and that marriage is the highest ideal of life. She lived the pure life of a nun and worshipped Krishna as her own child. She became so advanced in spirituality that now hundreds of educated men and women of high rank in Calcutta come to see her, to take spiritual instruction from her. They kiss the dust of her feet as devout Roman Catholics kiss the feet of the statue of Mary, revere her and call her the Mother of God, Mother of Krishna, the Shepherd. She is still living near Calcutta. She feels in herself the presence of the blessed Mother of the universe.

Another wonderful result of this conception of God as the Mother of the universe is that when a man worships God as his mother he always thinks of himself as a child in its Mother's arms. As a child does not fear anything when it is near its mother, so the worshipper of the Divine Mother is never afraid of anything. He sees the Blessed Mother everywhere. In every woman he sees the manifestation of his Eternal Mother. Consequently, every woman on earth is his mother. He conquers all lust and sense desires. He sees woman in a different light. He worships every woman mentally. I have seen a man

who lived on this earth like a living child of the Divine Mother, always protected and taken care of by Her. He worshipped God as the Mother of the universe. Through that worship he became pure, righteous and spiritual. He used to say "O, my Mother, Thou art all in all. Thou art my Guide, my Leader and Strength." His Divine Mother showed him the true nature of man and woman. He bowed down before all women, young, mature and old, and said to them—"You are the living representatives of my Divine Mother on earth." How can a child have any other relation to one who is the same as its real mother? By this kind of devotion he conquered all lust and worldliness. His child-like, whole-souled and rapturous self-consecration to the Divine Mother is a landmark in the religious history of India. His whole life, which was the personification of purity, self-control, self-resignation and filial love to the Divine Mother, stands as a mighty testimony to the reality and effectiveness of the worship of God as the Mother of the universe. When he sang the praises of the Divine Mother he gave life to every word he uttered, and no soul could hear him without being moved to tears by deep devotional feelings, without realizing that this wonderful child was in direct communion with his Divine Mother. His Divine Mother showed him that each woman was her incarnation, so he worshipped and honored all women as a son might worship his own mother. Some Western people may laugh at such reverence, but a Hindu is extremely proud of it. He knows how to honor a woman.

Professor Max Müller was much impressed with the wonderful life of this great sage, and recently published his life and sayings.\* He was once asked: "If we are the children of your Divine Mother, why does She not take care of us? Why does She not come to us and take us up in Her arms?" The sage replied: "A mother has several children. To one she has given a doll, to another some candy, to the third a music box, according as each one likes. Thus when they begin to play and are absorbed they forget their mother; she in the meanwhile looks after her household work. But the moment any one of them gets tired of the play, and, throwing aside the plaything, cries for the mother, 'Mamma, mamma dear!' she runs quick to him, takes her up in her arms, kisses him often and often and caresses him. So, oh man! being absorbed in your play with the playthings of the world you have forgotten your Divine Mother; when you get tired of your play, and, throwing aside the toys, you cry for Her sincerely and with the simplicity of a child, She will come at once and take you up in Her arms. Now you want to play and She has given you all that you need at present."

Each one of us will see the Divine Mother sooner or later. The Mother is always taking care of us and protecting us whether we feel it or not, whether we realize it or not. "O, Mother Divine! Thou art the eternal Energy, the infinite source of the universe. Thy powers manifest in the infinite variety of names

\*See "Life and Sayings of Ramakrishna," by F. Max Müller. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

and forms. Being deluded by the power of ignorance we forget Thee, and take pleasure in the playthings of the world. But when we come to Thee, take Thy refuge and worship Thee, Thou makest us free from ignorance and worldliness, and givest eternal happiness by keeping us, Thine own children, on Thy bosom."

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# VEDÂNTA PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE BY

SWÂMI ABHEDÂNANDA

ON

## Religion of the Hindus

DELIVERED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE VEDÂNTA SOCIETY,  
AT CARNEGIE LYCEUM, NEW YORK, SUNDAY,  
NOVEMBER 4TH, 1900

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FOURTH EDITION

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Published by the VEDÂNTA ASHRAMA  
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.



"That which exists is One; wise men call It by various names.—*Rigveda*, I. 164, 46.

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## THE RELIGION OF THE HINDUS.

THE religion of the Hindus is as old as the first appearance of the Aryans on the fertile country of north-western India. It is the unanimous opinion of all the Oriental scholars, that the forefathers of the Aryans who inhabited India were, in prehistoric times, the common ancestors of the Persians, Greeks, Romans, Germans, Anglo-Saxons, and all of those who are now known as the descendants of the Aryan family. A modern orthodox Hindu, who lives on the bank of the Ganges, and dislikes to associate with a European calling him a "Mlechha," does not know that the so-called "Mlechha" has only a more distant blood-relationship to him than his own brother or sister, and that he differs from him only in manners, customs, and modes of living. The same Aryan blood flows to-day in the veins of a full-blooded German, Frenchman, Anglo-Saxon, or an American, who despises a Hindu because of his brown skin, or his religious beliefs, and calls him a "heathen," not knowing that the so-called "heathen" is of his own race and that he still upholds the unparalleled religious ideas of his ancient Aryan forefathers. An educated German, or a liberal-minded American of to-day, more

closely resembles in his mode of thinking, in his intellectual pursuits, in freedom of thought and in spiritual ideals, an educated Hindu of the present time, than he does a Jew or any other descendant of the Semitic race. However different a Hindu may appear to an American externally, it should always be remembered that both are descendants of the common Aryan stock.

The word "Hindu" is of comparatively later origin in the history of the Aryan family. It was at first used by the Persian invaders of India, but it has never been adopted by the Indo-Aryans themselves. The proper name of the nation which inhabits India is "Aryan." Even to-day, the so-called *Hindus* call themselves "Aryans." Their religion is neither Hinduism nor Brahmanism; these names do not mean anything to them, being given by foreigners, not by natives of India. They call their religion "Arya Dharma," that is, Aryan Religion, or the religion of the ancient Aryans; or "Sanātana Dharma," the Eternal Religion. When the Persian invaders came to the north-west of India, they found the river Indus, in Sanskrit, "Sindhu," and called that river "Hindu" instead, and those who inhabited the east side of that river, "Hindus." Afterwards their religion was called Hinduism by the Mohammedan and Christian invaders. The word Brahmanism is of a still later origin, being an invention of the Christian missionaries. It is the general belief in the West, that the ancient Hindus, or rather the Indo-Aryans, were uncivilized people, that they had no religion of any kind; but the students of the Rig Veda, which is now considered by

scholars as the oldest revealed scripture of the world, are well aware of the fact that the Indo-Aryans of the Vedic period, at least 2000 B.C., were highly civilized and most advanced in the understanding of the spiritual, moral, and physical laws which governed the phenomenal world.

The ancient Vedic Rishis, or Seers of Truth, described their knowledge of those laws in a simple, poetical language which is inspiring to readers in all ages. They described what they understood, and those descriptions show how vast was their wisdom, how deep was their insight in spiritual perception, how sublime was their conception of God and how grand was their idea of human immortality.

Those impersonal descriptions of the laws which they discovered were handed down from generation to generation by memory, long before the art of writing was known to the world; they are therefore called in Sanskrit "Shruti," meaning that which is heard. Later, when they were collected together, they were also called "Veda," which means wisdom. By this word, Veda, was not meant any written book, but the collected wisdom of the ancient Seers of Truth; and as their religion stands upon the Veda, or the collected wisdom of the past ages, it is called Vedic Religion, more properly "Vedânta Religion."

These Vedic seers were great philosophers; they discovered and understood the law of evolution in this universe at a period when the Aryans of the West were dwelling in caves and painting their bodies in lieu of clothing. They discovered also the moral and

spiritual laws which govern the higher life of the soul.

When the Hindus use the word "Seer of Truth," they do not mean any seer of visions or dreamer of dreams; but they mean those great philosophers and saints who realized the higher truths by superconscious perception. The prophets, or seers of the Old Testament, were rarely philosophers, nor did they discover any higher law; they were ethical teachers in degenerate times, pointing out the errors of their countrymen and warning them to cease from evil ways, under penalty of punishment by Jehovah. They predicted events, and were regarded as prophets *if* the things came to pass. As Vedânta, or the religion of the Indo-Aryans, is based upon the spiritual laws discovered by the ancient "Seers of Truth," it is absolutely impersonal. There was no founder of the religion of the Hindus; it has existed from time immemorial; but all other religions, like Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Mohammedanism, had their founders and were built around the personality of those founders. The religion of the Hindus is not limited by any book nor by the existence or non-existence of any particular personage. If we study the words of the earliest known Rishi, or Vedic "Seer of Truth," even there we find that he alludes to others as having seen similar truths before himself. It is for this reason that the religion of the Indo-Aryans never had any particular creed or dogma or theology as its guide. Everything that harmonized with the eternal laws described by the ancient Seers of Truth was recognized and accepted by them as true.

From the very beginning this religion has been as free as the air which we breathe. As air touches all flowers and carries their fragrance along with it, wherever it blows, so this religion takes in all that is true and beneficial to mankind. Like the sky overhead, it embraces the spiritual atmosphere around all nations and all countries. It is a well-known fact that the Vedânta religion of the Hindus surpasses Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, or Mohammedanism in its antiquity, grandeur, sublimity, in its philosophy, and, above all, in its conception of God. The God of the Hindus is omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, all-merciful, and impersonally personal. He is not like the extra-cosmic creator as described in Genesis, but is immanent and resident in nature; He is more merciful, more impartial, more just, more compassionate than Elohim Jahveh, the tribal god of the sons of Israel. The God of the Aryan religion is more benevolent and more unlimited in power and majesty than the Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians.

As early as 1500 years before the Christian era, when the sons of Israel were worshipping their tribal god Jahveh in the form of a bull,\* or calf, and were appeasing his wrath by bloody sacrifices, nay, by shedding human blood upon his altar, and were gradually outgrowing the sun-worship, Kewan or Saturn-worship, tree and serpent-worship, and were struggling for a monotheistic conception of one moral ruler of nature; at this early date the Aryans of India realized

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\* See notes at the end.



one all-pervading Supreme Spirit as the Creator, Preserver, and moral Ruler of all animate and inanimate objects of the universe. When Zoroaster in Persia was preaching the dualistic concept of two spirits, the creator of good and the creator of evil, as two separate beings, the Aryan sages in India were proclaiming before the world that there were not two creators, but One, Who was above both good and evil. "That which exists is One; wise men call It by various names." (Rig Veda, I, 164, 46.)

In the fourteenth century B.C., when Moses was reforming the immoral, lawless, nomadic tribes of Israel by giving them the ten commandments in the name of Jahveh; at that ancient time, the ethical teachings of the Vedic sages were already perfected, and almost all their followers were well established in the practice of the moral and spiritual principles of the Vedas. It was at this time that the sublime teachings of the immortal Bhagavad Gîtâ, the "Song Celestial" as Sir Edwin Arnold calls it, were proclaimed by Krishna, the Christ of India.

At a period when thinkers among the Semitic tribes were trying to explain the origin of the human race, as well as that of the universe, and were collecting the fragments of the mythological stories of creation which were scattered among Chaldeans, Phœnicians, Babylonians, and Persians; at that time the minds of the Aryan philosophers of India were firmly established in the doctrine of the evolution of the universe out of one eternal Energy, called in Sanskrit "Prakriti," and the evolution of man from

lower animals was taught for the first time. Prof. Huxley admits this when he says: "To say nothing of Indian Sages, to whom Evolution was a familiar notion ages before Paul of Tarsus was born."

When the worshippers of Jahveh had no conception of any existence after death, nor of the existence of soul as separate from and independent of body, nor of immortality; in those days, the Aryan philosophers were fully established in their belief that the soul was separate from the body, and they were giving philosophical demonstrations and rational explanations of the nature of the human soul, preaching before the masses that the soul was beginningless and endless and that it was indestructible. The Vedas assert "That (the human soul) the fire cannot burn, nor water moisten; the air cannot dry, nor the sword pierce."

During the Babylonian captivity, which took place between 536 and 333 B.C., when the sons of the house of Israel were borrowing from the Parsees their ideas of heaven and hell and were modifying their imperfect monotheistic conception of Jahveh from a tribal god into a god of the universe by giving him the attributes of Ahura Mazda; when they were adopting the Persian conception of angels, archangels, and a host of intermediate celestial beings; when they were beginning to accept the Persian idea of the resurrection after death; at that time the glory of the Aryan religion was established and shown to the world by the advent of Buddha, the greatest religious reformer that the world has ever known. He taught that heaven and hell existed only in our minds, that the

worship of an extra-cosmic personal god was not the highest form of belief, and that the belief in angels and archangels was a kind of superstition.

About the time when the Pharisees among the Jews were beginning to believe in a heaven and to think that the highest ideal of life was to go there and enjoy the pleasures of life eternally, Buddha was preaching in India the doctrine of Reincarnation and the law of Karma, and was giving the most rational arguments against the desire for the enjoyment of pleasures in heaven, showing that these pleasures were non-eternal and that the goal of man was perfection, not enjoyment. Buddha taught the way of attaining perfection through the emancipation of the soul from the bonds of self-delusion. The ultimate ideals, according to the Vedānta religion, ought to be, not going to some particular place of enjoyment, or before the throne of a personal god, but the knowledge of our true spiritual nature, and freedom from the bondage of ignorance and selfishness and all other imperfections, through the attainment of god-consciousness in this life. Without fulfilling such ideals, our earthly existence is no better than that of animals—nay, it is not worth living.

There is one peculiarity in the religion of the Indo-Aryans, and that is that it has never been separate from logic, science, and philosophy; it stands like a huge banyan tree, whose branches, spreading out in all directions, cover a large area of space; it has room for all phases of religious thought and all systems of philosophy, from the highest flights of a Kant

or a Hegel, from the idealism of Bishop Berkeley and of Spinoza, from the loftiest pinnacles of the Platonic system, from the ultimate conclusions of modern agnosticism, down to the lowest form of ceremonial and ritualistic worship, worship of symbols, or hero-worship, or any other phases of religious thought which human minds have ever conceived. All these have place within the all-embracing fold of the religion of the Hindus, because they alone recognize the necessity for different planes of religious expression in a world that is in different stages of human evolution. Cousin said: "The history of Indian philosophy is the abridged history of the philosophy of the world."

It is for this reason that very few can correctly describe the religion of this mighty nation of philosophers, or indicate exactly what it teaches. Here you may ask: "If there be so much diversity of opinion, how can there be any harmony?" But this was answered by the ancient Vedânta philosophers who taught that there was unity under the variety of religious thoughts, and in this unity lay the harmony between these apparently contradictory beliefs. The religion of the Indo-Aryans cannot be judged from outside. When a foreigner goes to India and looks about, he finds statues of some great sage, or he finds symbolic figures in temples that he does not understand, and he instantly jumps to a conclusion that the Hindus have no religion, and calls them idolators and worshippers of false gods. Imbued with the idea that the tribal god of the house of Israel was the only true God, and being brought up in a school where

fanaticism and bigotry are the criteria of spiritual culture, unless they are unusually free from narrowness and prejudice, these foreigners are very apt to fall into entire misconception of Hindu life and ideals. Especially is this often true of Christian missionaries, who are frequently persons of strongly bigoted views, which unfit them to be fair and impartial observers. They can only look at things from one narrow standpoint, and so fail to see truly and correctly.

When missionaries first went to India, they tried to make converts by force. Those who read the history of India know how the Portuguese missionaries preached the Bible by holding swords and guns in their hands. We can only pity such fanatics, who in the name of religion sow the seeds of discord and quarrel wherever they go, and who in this age of enlightenment believe that those who do not worship Jahveh, the tribal god of the house of Israel and accept Christ as the only saviour of mankind, will all go to perdition. We are sorry for those who waste their wealth and energy by supporting institutions which breed fanaticism. What evidence is there that the worship of Elohim Jahveh should be the worship of the one true God, and why should the Supreme Being of the universe be called a false god when worshipped under any other name? 'The religion of the Hindus is not the worship of a false god. It is not idolatry. The Hindus never worshipped idols. Did you ever hear a Hindu explaining his own religion? You have heard what the missionaries have said, but why do you not ask the Hindu himself what kind of

a god he worships? Why do you judge him *ex parte*, before hearing the Hindu's side of the question?

Truth is the standard of a Hindu, the worship of Truth is his religion, and the attainment of Truth is his ideal. Truth is that which is not confined by any name or any form. Here I wish to make clear whether or not the Hindus are idolators. There is no such thing as idol-worship among the Hindus. When you go to India and visit a temple, there you may see a priest sitting before a statue of Krishna, or Buddha, or Râma, or of some great Incarnation, Prophet or Teacher. The so-called idols are either such statues, or else are merely symbols. They are understood as such by every Hindu. Do you know what they represent? They are symbols of the Divine Energy, of the attributes of God, or of abstract ideas, hard to grasp without some outward form. The priest who sits before the statues of those who were living beings at one time, shows his reverence to these great spiritual Masters. If you go to this priest and ask his conception of God, you will hear him say: "God is omnipotent, infinite. His spirit pervades the whole universe. He is beyond all forms and names. He is the Soul of our souls; in Him we live, through Him we exist, and without Him there cannot be anything." Is this idolatry? What kind of idolatry is this? It is very easy for anybody to say that it is a worship of a false god, or of an idol, but if a person will look beneath the surface and enquire of the Hindus themselves, they can easily discover how mistaken are such assertions. If the Hindus are idol-worshippers be-

cause they show respect to their spiritual Masters, like Krishna or Buddha, why should not the Christians be called idolators when they show respect to Christ, kneeling down before his statue or picture? If the Hindu is idolatrous because he concentrates his mind upon some religious symbol, like the cross, or triangle, or circle, why should not the same term be applied to the Christian when he thinks of the crucifix or keeps it on the altar? Did the Hindus get the cross or triangle from the Christians? History affirms that the cross existed in India as a religious symbol centuries before Christ was born; but a Hindu never denounces any other religion, nor finds fault with any other worship or conception of God, however childish or anthropomorphic it may be.

True religion, according to the Hindus, does not consist in the belief in a certain set of dogmas or creeds, but in the attainment of God-consciousness through spiritual unfoldment. It is being and becoming God. It is the subjugation of selfish love and desire for self-aggrandizement, and the expression of Divine love, truthfulness, and kindness to all. The object of such a religion is the freedom of the soul from the bondages of the world.

You have been told that the Hindus are immoral, that they are the most immoral nation on earth; and I am ashamed to say that some of my countrymen and women, having enlisted themselves as Christian converts, have told you in this hall, no longer ago than last Spring, that the Hindus were immoral, that they had no ethics, no religion. Being hypnotized,

as it were, by their propagandistic zeal, they have forgotten the facts. But, friends, if the religion of the Hindus has done nothing else, it has done this much: many of the worst vices that exist to-day among Christian nations do not exist in India. The crimes and vices with which the daily papers of America are filled are very rare in India. It has been said again and again that Christianity alone can make men and women moral; the Hindu asks: "Why has it not made the men and women of the Western countries more moral than they are to-day?" Think of the most diabolical crimes committed all over the United States by so-called Christians and daily chronicled by the press! Your prisons and asylums are filled to their utmost capacity with criminals and lunatics. Will you therefore call Christianity a failure? Will you dare to claim that it alone of all religions in the world can make men good? Buddhists, Hindus, Mohammedans, and even large sections of the Chinese abstain entirely from intoxicating liquors, and the low percentage of brutality, of crimes of violence, and of cruelty to animals arises from the fact that they do not inflame their passions by alcoholic stimulants. Everywhere in this world there is wickedness and human failure, but if all things be taken into consideration, it will be found that there is no preponderance of vice among the heathen, nor of virtue among the Christians. Human nature varies in its expression, but is much the same in itself all over the earth.

The annual increase of criminals and lunatics in a nation not even 200 years old is perfectly appalling.



In the whole of the United States 10,000 murders are committed every year. Hundreds of dead babies of illegitimate birth are found in vacant lots, in ash-barrels, in the rivers and on the roadsides. What has Christianity done to stop such crimes and vices? The words of Christ to those who see the mote in their brother's eye, but cannot discern the beam in their own eyes, should be remembered to-day. It is wise to let reforms begin at home, and that Christian nations should amend themselves before criticising the faults and failings of heathen lands.

Dr. J. H. Barrows, who was the secretary of the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, after visiting India for three months, returned to New York and gave a course of lectures. In one lecture I heard him say: "The Hindus have no ethics, no morality, no science, no philosophy, no religion; whatever they have got they have learned from Christian missionaries." On the contrary, any fair-minded student of the Hindu thought will notice at the outset that the philosophy and religion of the Hindus are based entirely upon the highest standard of ethics and morality. Prof. Max Müller says "we find ethics in the beginning, ethics in the middle, and ethics in the end." No human being can become truly spiritual unless he or she reaches moral perfection. Moral perfection is the beginning of spiritual life or spiritual evolution; and spiritual perfection consists in the manifestation of divinity and the emancipation of the soul from the bondages of ignorance and selfishness, which are the causes of sin and wickedness. A truly spiritual man

is master of himself and possesses perfect control over his animal nature. No man who is a slave to his passions, desires, and animal propensities, however highly ethical he may appear in society, can be called truly moral, not to mention spiritual.

Having these high ideals, the Hindu religion does not encourage any of the vices, and especially inculcates an avoidance of drunkenness, which prevents its victims from gaining self-control. Hindu religion has no need of any help from temperance unions or the societies for the prevention of cruelty to women and children, or of cruelty to animals. Such societies are unknown among Hindus. Their religion itself has made the Hindus kind toward animals and has taught them to revere every woman as a representative of the Divine Mother on earth. Some of the Christian converts, in their zeal for eradicating certain social evils which have crept into Hindu society, have falsely attributed the causes of these evils to the religious ideas of the Hindus. Many of you have been told that the Hindu religion teaches that women have no souls. Such an absurd idea can only be accepted by those who do not study and investigate for themselves. No Hindu ever imagined anything so crude. We do not find any such idea in the Aryan religion; but we can perhaps trace its source to the Semitic conception of the creation of woman out of a man's rib, the lofty concept of the origin of woman that still stands in the Christian Bible! The Hindu knows that the soul is sexless and only manifests on the physical plane as either man or woman to fulfil a certain purpose in life.

Some of you perhaps have the wrong impression that, according to the Hindu faith, a woman cannot reach salvation, but if you read a little of the Bhagavad Gitâ you will find there: "All men and women, whether they believe in a God or not, are bound to reach perfection sooner or later."

As Christian civilization has been founded upon commercialism and has kept the ethical standard in the background, so Aryan civilization in India has been based upon ethical standards, and commercialism was set aside and almost ignored. As a result the Christian nations have commercial prosperity, while the Hindus as a nation have lived for centuries exemplary moral lives and have become the spiritual teachers of the world. Read the accounts of the Greek and Chinese travellers who visited India both before and after the Christian era. Read Prof. Max Müller's celebrated works, "India: What Can It Teach Us?" and "Life and Sayings of Râma Krisna," and learn the truth for yourselves.

Hindu religion still produces men like Christ and Buddha, and women like Sâradâ Devi even in this age of commercialism and selfishness. How can a religion which has no foundation upon the highest ideals of morality and ethics produce such men and women? The lives and characters of some of them have already within the last ten years become ideals for the masses. "A tree is known by its fruits," said Jesus, and he spoke truly. The characters of such men and women are the embodiments of ethics, the personifications of moral and spiritual perfection.

Therefore, when persons bring false charges against the religion of the Hindus, you should remember that they do it either through ignorance or through a feverish zeal for evangelizing India and converting it to Christian ideals. They feel it necessary to save the souls of the so-called heathen from eternal perdition.

The religion of Vedānta does not teach that we are "born in sin and conceived in iniquity," nor does it say that we have inherited as a birth-right the sins of some fallen man who was tempted by an evil spirit called "Satan." On the contrary, it tells us that all men and women, irrespective of their color, creed, or religious beliefs, are children of Immortal Bliss. It teaches that we are not the helpless victims of our parents' sins, but that our present condition is the resultant of our past deeds, and that our future state will be the result of our present actions. Parents do not create the souls of their children, they are but the channels, the instruments through which the individual souls incarnate or manifest themselves on the physical plane. This idea is popularly known as the law of Karma and Reincarnation, which means the remanifestation on this earth of the individual soul, or the germ of life, according to its desires and tendencies, which will determine the conditions of its existence.

The religion of Vedānta may be called the "Science of the Soul." As modern science does not deal with dogmas and does not insist upon belief in the authority of any person or book, but depends entirely upon correct observation and experience of the facts

of nature to discover the laws which govern the phenomena of the universe, so Vedânta, or the Science of the Soul, does not deal with dogmas or creeds, but explains through logic and reason the spiritual nature of man, or the true nature of the soul. It describes the origin, growth, and process of its gradual evolution from the minutest germ of life up to the highest spiritual man, as Christ, or Buddha, or Râma Krishna, as well as points out the purpose and ultimate goal of such evolution. This Science of the Soul discusses such questions as: Whether or not the soul can exist independently of the body; whether or not it existed before the present birth; whether or not it was created by any being? Vedânta enquires if the soul exist after death? If it retain its individuality? If it be free or bound? If bound, can it ever become free? etc. In attempting to solve such questions of vital importance, the Vedânta philosophers did not speculate like the Greek or German philosophers, but explained through logic and scientific method the spiritual laws which they discovered in their super-conscious state. Those spiritual laws gave a foundation to their religious system. The spiritual laws being eternal, the religion which was based upon them is called "Eternal religion."

In India religion and philosophy are one. Religion is the practical side of philosophy and the latter is the rational side of religion. They are inseparably connected. Therefore when we speak of Vedânta philosophy, we mean both religion and philosophy at the same time. Although there have been many other

philosophies in India, still Vedānta includes the fundamental principles of all of them.

The ancient thinkers in India, after studying the phenomena of the universe, started many theories to explain the origin of the phenomenal world of which the Atomic theory of Kanada and the Evolution theory of Kapila still remain unsurpassed by similar scientific theories of the nineteenth century. Nearly four thousand years ago the Hindu philosophers came to understand that the world was not created out of nothing, but was the result of the evolution of one eternal Energy, which is called in Sanskrit *Prakriti*, in Latin, *Procreatrix*. In one of the Upanishads we read of a sage who was explaining the mystery of Creation to his son. He said: "My dear child, some people say that this world has come out of nothing, but how can something come out of nothing?" It has often been said that the doctrine of Evolution is the marvel of modern times, and that it was unknown in the past ages; but those who have studied more closely are aware that it was well known to the Hindus and that there are clear evidences of it among the Greeks. Well has it been said by Sir Monier Williams that "The Hindus were Spinozites more than 2000 years before the existence of Spinoza; Darwinians many centuries before Darwin; and evolutionists many centuries before the doctrine of Evolution had been accepted by the scientists of our time and before any word like evolution existed in any language of the world."—"Hinduism and Brahminism.") Standing upon the firm rock of the evolution

theory, the Hindus explained the mysteries of the universe, solved the problems of life, and arrived at a conclusion which has not yet been reached by the scientists of to-day. The evolutionists of ancient India did not arrive at the fatalistic conclusions of many of the modern evolutionists of the West. On the contrary, they maintained that the individual soul is not brought into evolution by any cosmic force or extra-cosmic being, but that it creates its own destiny and moulds its own fate, by its own desires, tendencies, and actions. It is free to desire and to act in accordance with its desire. Each individual soul is a storehouse of infinite powers and possesses unlimited possibilities. Souls were not created out of nothing nor by the will of any being, but are eternal, beginningless and endless. At present they appear, however, as subject to the law of causation. The Hindus applied the law of causation to the moral and spiritual nature of individuals. In Sanskrit it is called "Law of Karma." By this law they explained why one man is born with good tendencies and another with evil ones.

The Hindus do not believe that God creates one man to enjoy and another to suffer, nor do they believe that He punishes the wicked or rewards the virtuous. Punishment and reward are but the reactions of our own actions. Each individual soul reaps the fruits of its own acts, either here or in some other existence.

The religion of Vedānta does not teach the worship of many gods, but of one God, who is called by

many names and who is free to appear in any form in accordance with the desires of the worshippers. The God of the Hindus has no particular name nor any particular form. Thousands of names are given to that Supreme Being who is nameless and formless. He is not extra-cosmic but intra-cosmic, and immanent as well as transcendent. He appears as with form to a dualist and without form to a non-dualist. He is one, yet His aspects are many. He is personal, impersonal, and beyond both. He appears as personal to a dualistic or monotheistic worshipper, and as impersonal to a qualified non-dualistic believer or one who believes in the immanency and transcendency of God; while to a pure non-dualist, the same God is the one Infinite Ocean of absolute existence, intelligence, bliss, and love.

The religion of the Hindus recognizes the spiritual growth of the soul and describes the different stages of spiritual development. In the first stage God appears as extra-cosmic, as the Creator or the Father of the universe, Who dwells outside of ourselves and of the world. This is the dualistic conception of God.

Some people say that the Hindus got the idea of the Fatherhood of God from Christian sources. But those who have read the Vedic literature, or even the Bhagavad Gitâ have found therein many passages where God is addressed as the Father of the universe. "O Lord, Thou art the Father of the universe both animate and inanimate. Thou art worshipped by all. None is equal to Thee in the triple world. Who then



can excel Thee, O Thou of power incomparable?" (Bhagavad Gitâ, ch. xi., v. 43.)

In the second stage, God appears as immanent in the universe; as the one stupendous Whole of which we are but parts. Then He is the Mother of the universe as well as the Father; or, in other words, He is then the material as well as the efficient cause of all phenomena. The idea of the Fatherhood of God is not considered by the Hindus to be the highest, because it makes Him extra-cosmic or outside of the world and as efficient cause only. In this concept nature coexists with God as the material cause of the universe. But when we comprehend that nature is nothing but the divine energy and inseparable from the Supreme Being, then He becomes the Mother of the universe as well as Father. This is called qualified non-dualistic conception.

Thirdly, there is a still higher conception than this: the concept of the unity of the essential nature of man with the Universal Spirit or Reality of the universe. From this point of view Christ said: "I and my Father are one." The Hindu says: "I am He, I am that one eternal Being." This union on the spiritual plane is the highest ideal of all religions.

The Hindus say that the dualistic belief in a personal God with a human form and human attributes is the expression of the spiritual childhood of the soul. From dualism the soul rises through qualified non-dualism to monism. Each of these stages of spiritual development is true in itself, and necessary, as are childhood, youth, and maturity in the physical

body. It is good to be born and brought up within the limits of a church creed as a dualist, but it is not good to remain there all through life, and he who does so has failed to outgrow the stage of spiritual childhood. Growth is life and stagnation is death. Therefore Vedânta recognizes the importance of spiritual growth in religion.

What we believe to-day may not be necessary for us to-morrow; let us be ever ready to face the necessity of growth. But we must not go backward; we must move onward until the ideal is realized. "Arise, awake, seek the company of the wise, and stop not until the goal is reached;" until you see God everywhere and become one with God. This has been the cry of the spiritual teachers of India.

There is no other religion in the world which emphasizes the attainment of God-consciousness in this life so much as the Vedânta religion of the Hindus.

The paths which lead to this goal of all religions should vary according to the tendency, capacity, and spiritual development of the individual. Therefore Vedânta prescribes no set path, but offers many paths to suit different minds: such as the path of right knowledge and right discrimination (Jnâna Yoga); of concentration and meditation (Râja Yoga); of work for work's sake (Karma Yoga); and lastly, of devotion and worship (Bhakti Yoga). Each of these paths has various branches. As one coat does not fit all bodies, so one path does not suit all minds.

The religion of the Hindus has made them peace-loving and humane, and it is because of their religious

ideas that the Hindus have never invaded any other country. They are not afflicted with the insatiable greed for power, wealth, and territorial possession, which is so strong among Christian nations.

The Hindus practice non-resistance of evil, which was taught by the Vedânta, by Buddha, and afterwards by Christ, but which is not yet understood nor practiced by many of the followers of Christianity. Vedânta has made the Hindus realize that all the various religious sects and creeds of the world are but the partial expressions of one underlying Religion, which is nameless and universal. The knower of that underlying Religion does not need any creed, or denominational name, or particular Church. The worship of Truth is his creed and denomination, and the human body is the holy temple wherein dwells the Eternal Spirit. The result of this grand idea is that there has been very little religious persecution in the whole religious history of India.

It matters not to what sect, creed, or denomination we may belong. Our first duty should be to see how far we have advanced in spiritual life, how near we have approached God-consciousness, and how much of the mastery over our animal nature we have acquired. Knowing these to be the essentials of true religion, a follower of the teachings of Vedânta never fights for a doctrine or a belief; never denounces the religious ideas of others; never says "my religion is true and yours is false"; never preaches "my God is the only true one, all others are false"; never persecutes another for differing from himself; but always

lends a helping hand to the followers of all sects and creeds who seek his spiritual help, sends good thoughts and blessings towards all, prays for all, and recognizes the unity of purpose in all the variety of sects and creeds.

“O Lord! As rivers rising from different mountains run, crooked or straight, towards one ocean, so all these different religions, sects, and creeds, rising from different points of view, flow crooked or straight toward Thee, the Infinite Ocean of existence, intelligence, bliss, and love.”

#### NOTES.

Regarding the worship of Jahveh in the form of a bull, Dr. A. Kuenen, the professor of theology at the University of Leyden, says: “Side by side with the worship of false gods, there existed in Ephraim a Jahveh-worship, which is strongly condemned by Amos and Hosea, nay, is placed by the latter entirely upon a level with the service of false gods. It is the worship of Jahveh under the form of a bull.” (*Religion of Israel*, Vol. I, p. 73.)

As regards human sacrifices the Doctor says: “We cannot help assuming that those who worshipped Jahveh in this shape also slaughtered men in his honour.” (p. 75.)

“Jahveh was conceived by those who worshipped him to be a severe being, inaccessible to mankind, whom it was necessary to propitiate with sacrifices and offerings, and even with human sacrifices.” (p. 249.)

As regards sun-worship Dr. Kuenen says: "Originally Jahveh was a god of light or of the sun, and the heat of the sun and consuming fire were considered to proceed from him and to be ruled by him." (p. 249.)

Kewan, or Chiun, or Saturn-worship is described in Amos, v. 26, 27. Dr. Kuenen says: "Amos, in accordance with his contemporaries, ascribed the worship of Saturn to the Israelites in the desert." According to him there was a connection between the Saturn-worship and the dedication of the seventh day, and this custom was afterwards adopted and modified by the worshippers of Jahveh. (See Religion of Israel, Vol. I, p. 264.)

Tree-worship is mentioned in Deuteronomy, ch. xvi. 21. Grove (or Asherah) stands for a tree or stem driven into the ground close to the altar of Jahveh.

"He (Hezekiah) removed the high places, and brake the pillars, and cut down the Asherah; and he brake in pieces the brasen *serpent* that Moses had made; for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it; and he called it Nehustan." (II. Kings xviii. 4, revised version.)

According to the best authorities of the present day, Moses lived about the fourteenth century before Christ. Dr. Kuenen says: "The exodus is accordingly placed by one in B.C. 1321, by another in B.C. 1320, and by a third in 1314 B.C. Of course perfect accuracy on this point is unattainable. With this reservation I accept the year 1320 B.C. as the most probable." (R. of Is., Vol. I, p. 121.)

It is a well-known fact that the book of Genesis

was not written by Moses, but by some priest during the period of Jewish exile in Babylonia. Professor Kuenen says: "It is true, he (the author of the book of Origins) is a *priest*, and as such is deeply attached to the Jahveh-worship, the ceremonies, and the privileges of the priesthood. . . . The author of the book of Origins was not the first in Israel to narrate history, from the creation of the world to the settlement of the people in Canaan. The course which he had to follow, therefore, had been pointed out to him by his predecessors and especially by the author of the second Creation narrative and the accounts connected with it." (Vol. II, pp. 157-159.)

Regarding the influence of Parseeism upon Judaism, Dr. Kuenen says: "We discover the traces of the influence of the Persians in the *doctrine of angels*." Of the idea of Satan he says: "It would be hazardous to see the Persian notion of Auro-Mainyus in this small modification, were it not that the Jewish Satan subsequently acquired the traits of this spirit of darkness more and more. . . . The older Israelitish prophets and prophetic historians had not hesitated to derive even evil, moral evil not excepted, from Jahveh. This shows that the conception of the moral world had undergone an important change." (Vol. III, pp. 37-40.)

On the subject of immortality Dr. Kuenen says: "The Israelite's ideas of the human body and soul and their mutual relation hardly admitted any other notion of man's existence after death than that of resurrection, i.e., of the miraculous restoration of the

body into which the spirit returned. As soon as Jahveh takes back the breath of life, man and beast die. But that spirit does not live on, at all events not independently or individually. . . . Let it be taken into consideration, however, that the hope of a resurrection from the dead also existed among the Persians. . . . Does it not become extremely probable, therefore, that Parseeism was not entirely foreign to the rise and the first growth of the Jewish dogma? Must we not also assume here that the germs which lay hidden in Judaism were fertilized by contact with a religion in which they had arrived at maturity?" (Rel. of Is., Vol. III, p. 43.)

According to Hindu chronology, Krishna flourished in India about 1400 B.C.



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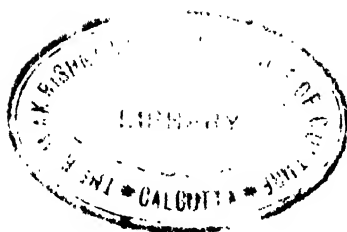




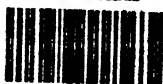








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